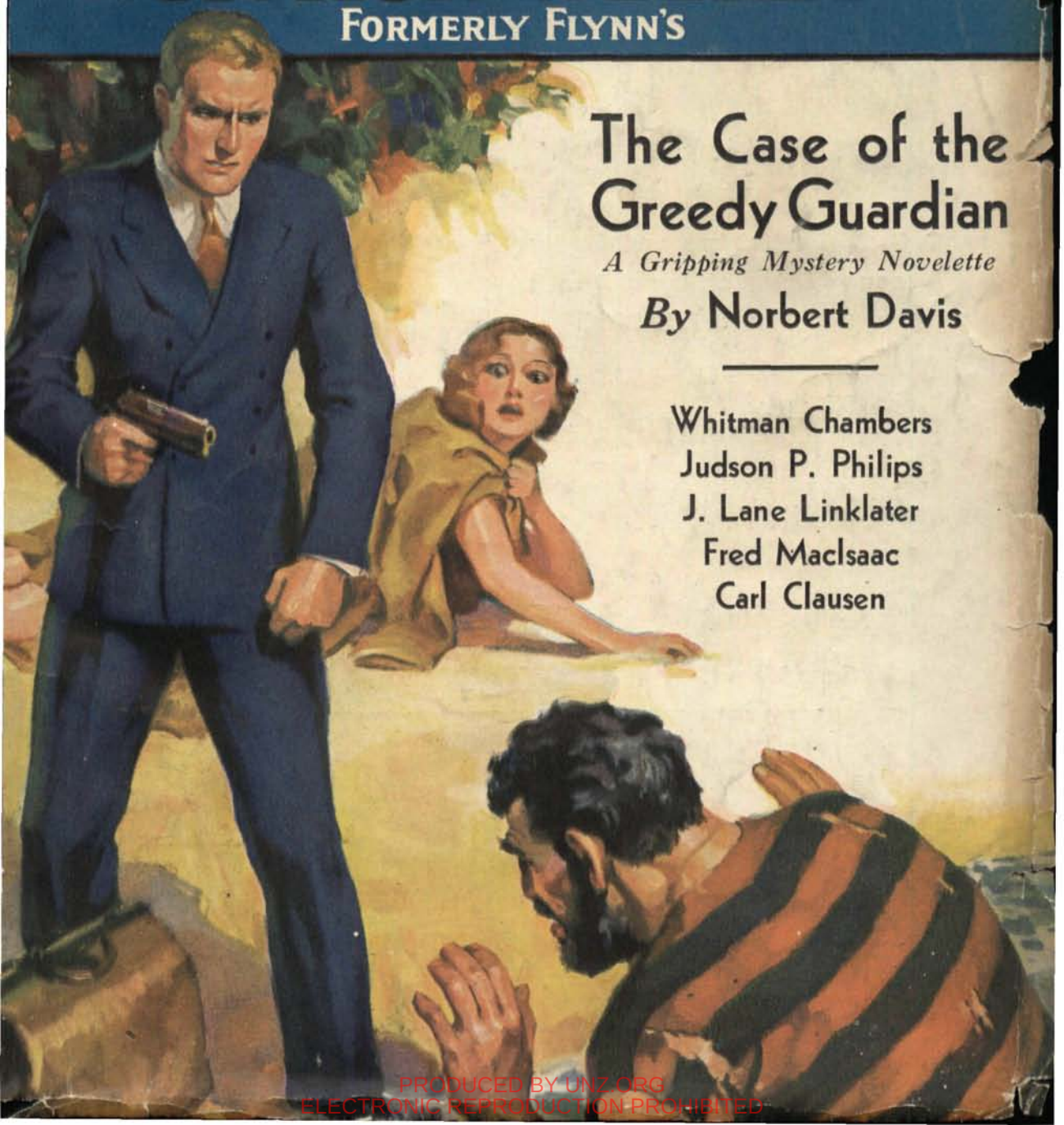
OCT. 3
10¢
Exciting Mysteries

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S



The Case of the Greedy Guardian

A Gripping Mystery Novelette

By Norbert Davis

Whitman Chambers
Judson P. Philips
J. Lane Linklater
Fred MacIsaac
Carl Clausen

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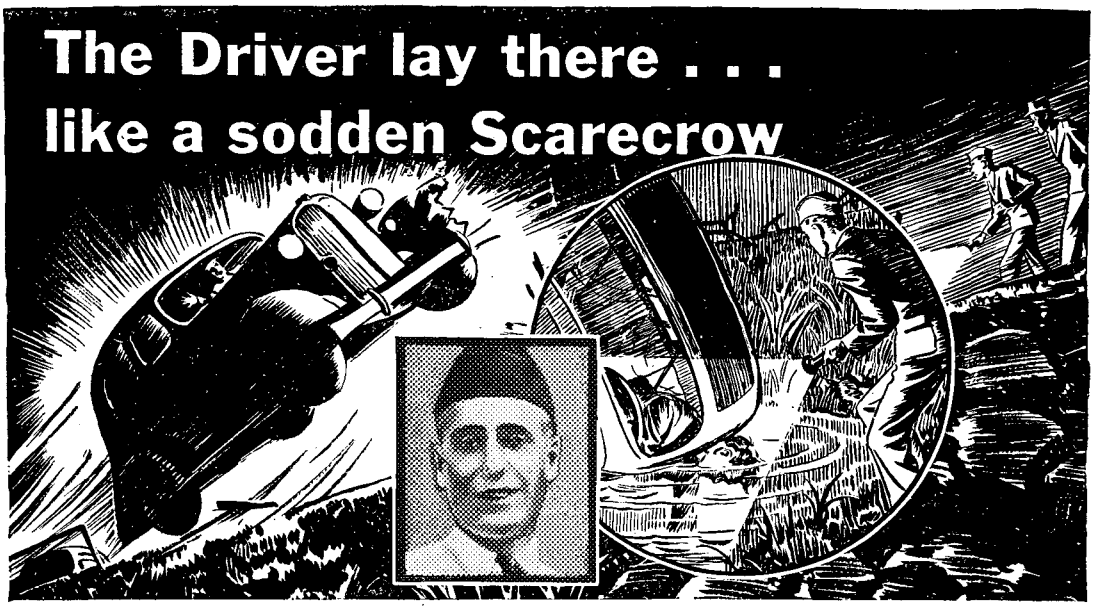
The Driver lay there . . . like a sodden Scarecrow



C. C. C. War Veteran and Buddy Rescue Motorist from Death as Car Plunges into Ditch

"Both cars were going plenty fast," says T. J. Trombley of Middletown, N. Y. "When they sideswiped, it sounded like a three-inch field piece going off. One driver righted his careening car and went on; the other swerved back and forth for fifty yards, and dropped eight feet off the edge of the highway into a half-filled drainage ditch.

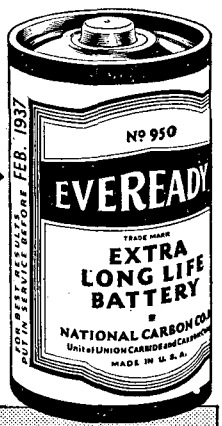
"My buddy and I ran to the spot where the car disappeared. It was so dark that all we could see was the hole of light my Eveready flashlight cut in the blackness. The driver, knocked out cold, lay there in the water, limp, like a sodden scarecrow. A few minutes and we had him out. But without my flashlight to help us, he certainly would have drowned before we could even have found him.

"I've been reading about dated Eveready batteries being fresh when you buy them... and I want to okay that. The Evereadys that saved this man's life were still full of pep after long, hard service."

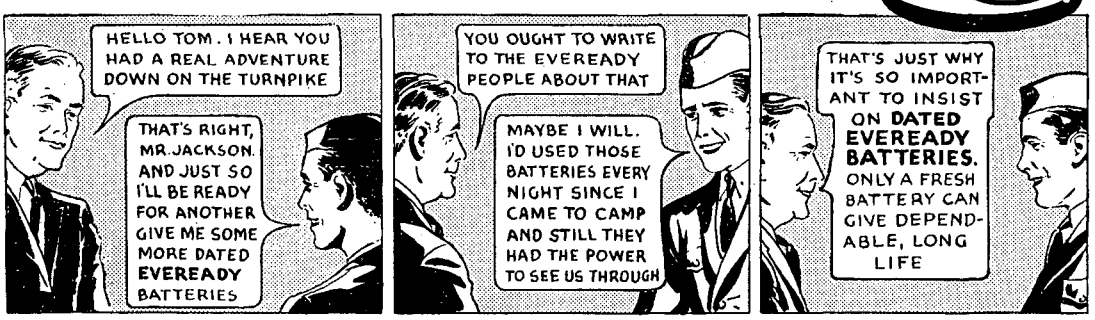
Thomas J Trombley.

EVEREADY BATTERIES ARE *FRESH* BATTERIES

National Carbon Co., Inc.
30 East 42nd St., N. Y. C., N. Y.



Once More the DATE-LINE is a LIFE-LINE


HELLO TOM. I HEAR YOU HAD A REAL ADVENTURE DOWN ON THE TURNPIKE
THAT'S RIGHT, MR. JACKSON. AND JUST SO I'LL BE READY FOR ANOTHER GIVE ME SOME MORE DATED EVEREADY BATTERIES
YOU OUGHT TO WRITE TO THE EVEREADY PEOPLE ABOUT THAT
MAYBE I WILL. I'D USED THOSE BATTERIES EVERY NIGHT SINCE I CAME TO CAMP AND STILL THEY HAD THE POWER TO SEE US THROUGH
THAT'S JUST WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO INSIST ON DATED EVEREADY BATTERIES. ONLY A FRESH BATTERY CAN GIVE DEPENDABLE, LONG LIFE

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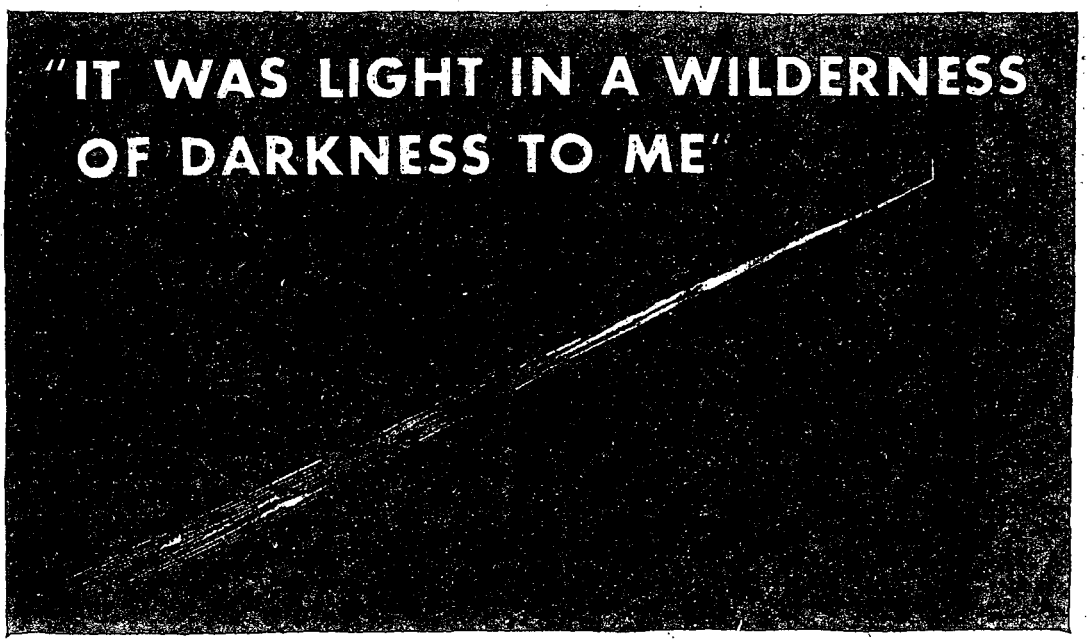

"I WAS STUCK. A wife and three kiddies — and the same old pay envelope. I couldn't see a thing ahead except the same old grind. Then one day I read an I. C. S. ad. The coupon fascinated me. A new idea struck me — it was a light in a wilderness of darkness to me! Today, because I mailed that coupon two years ago, I am a trained man — making a trained man's pay!"

Does this suggest something to you? Then mail the coupon today!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

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☆ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ☆

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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Formerly FLYNN'S

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The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover Is On Sale Every Wednesday

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY — 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President — THEODORE PROEHL, Treasurer
MESSAGERIES HACHETTE — PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 — 111 Rue Réaumur

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Read what happened to these two men when I said:

I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

These two fellows had the same chance. Each clipped and sent me a coupon, like the one in this ad. They got my book on Radio's opportunities. S. J. Ebert, 104-B Quadrangle, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, saw that Radio offered him a real chance. He enrolled. The other fellow, whom we will call John Doe, wrote that he wasn't interested. He was just one of those fellows who wants a better job, better pay, but never does anything about it. One of the many who spend their lives in a low-pay, no-future job, because they haven't the ambition, the determination, the action it takes to succeed.

But read what S. J. Ebert wrote me and remember that John Doe had the same chance: "Upon graduation I accepted a job as serviceman, and within three weeks was made Service Manager. This job paid me $40 to $50 a week compared with $18 I earned in a shoe factory before. Eight months later I went with station KWCR as operator. From there I went to KTNT. Now I am Radio Engineer with WSUI. I certainly recommend the N. R. I. to all interested in the greatest field of all, Radio."

"I WANT TO HELP YOU. If you are earning less than $30 a week I believe I can raise your pay. However, I will let you decide that. Let me show you what I have done for others, what I am prepared to do for you. Get my book, read it over, and decide one way or another."

J. E. Smith

Get Ready for Jobs Like These. Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time Radio servicing jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full time or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men who have taken N. R. I. Training are holding good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send you plans and ideas that have made good spare time money for hundreds of fellows. I send you special Radio equipment and show you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important Radio principles. My training gives you valuable, practical experience, while learning.

Get My 64-Page Book Free

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to anyone over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Training for Radio and Television; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning; tells about my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 6KK Washington, D. C.

FOR FREE BOOK OF FACTS ABOUT RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 6KK, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

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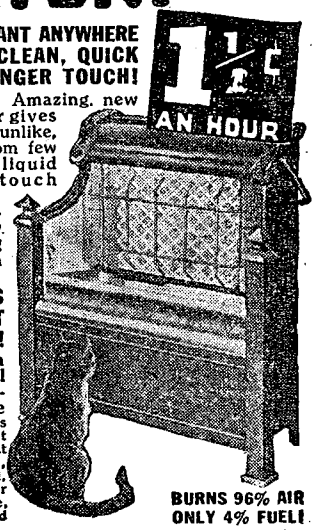

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BURNS 96% AIR ONLY 4% FUEL!

30-DAY HOME TRIAL IF YOU ACT NOW!

On our special introductory offer, you can get the new Radiant for 30 days, to know why thousands of owners praise its remarkable heating efficiency and economy. The special low price amazes all! Write TODAY for full details!

AGENTS! A great money-maker, full or spare time, with everything supplied. But you *must* write at once!

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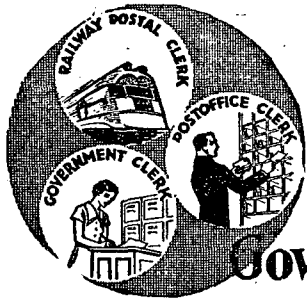

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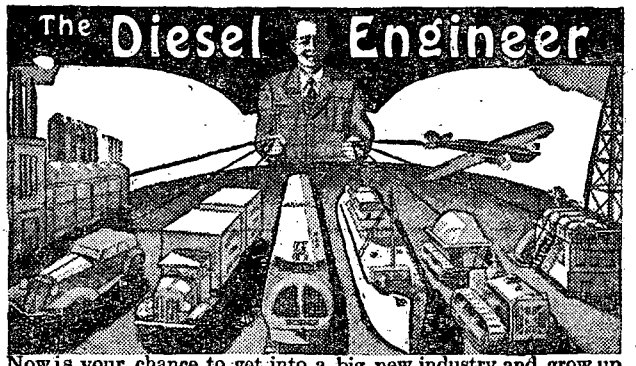

Is Your Job Safe?

Just as the gasoline engine changed the jobs of thousands who depended on horse-drawn vehicles for their living—so now the Diesel engine is fast invading both the power and transportation fields, and threatening the present jobs of thousands of workers.

What This New Field Offers You

Diesel engines are fast replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and busses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, pumps, etc. —opening up an increasing number of well-paid jobs for Diesel-trained men. You will get full information about the latest Diesel developments—two- and four-stroke cycles; low- and high-speed and heavy duty types; Diesel-electric generating systems, etc.—in our course. Includes all text material—with special diagrams for quick understanding of this new power.

Get our Free Diesel Booklet and find out what the Diesel field offers you—how quickly you can obtain a complete understanding of Diesel engine principles and operation by spare-time study at home. Asking for information involves no obligation—but it may mark the turning point in your life. Write TODAY for full information.

Now is your chance to get into a big new industry and grow up with it to an important position. Today there is practically no competition in the Diesel field, but the increasing use of Diesel engines will result in keen competition for jobs after a few years. If you start your training now and get established in this field, you need not worry about competition.

American School, Dept. D-71, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

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This Revelation Will Startle MEN PAST 40!

But It May Bring Years of Comfort to Their Lives!

HAVE you lost much of your strength? Do you suffer from pains in back and elsewhere? Are you forced to get up 2 to 10 times at night? Are you a victim of nervousness, fatigue, dizziness, chronic constipation, sciatica, so-called bladder weakness? Many men past 40 often mistake these ailments for symptoms of approaching old age. They undergo prolonged treatments that frequently bring no relief, because they have failed to strike at the real trouble.

Science has found that these ailments in men past 40 are often due to prostate Gland congestion or enlargement. This tiny gland becomes swollen and fails to function. Unless corrected it will likely grow worse. The result is often wretched old age or perhaps grave surgery.

What This Treatment Really Means

Science has now perfected an amazing home treatment used and endorsed by physicians and sanitariums. It goes directly to the area of the prostate gland, relieving congestion, increasing circulation, toning and stimulating. Many users report relief almost over night. Others say they actually felt 10 years younger in 7 days. Not a drug—medicine—massage—diet—violet ray—or exercise. It is a natural method.

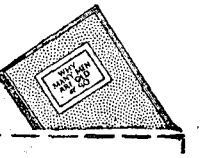
100,000 Men Have Found the Answer

They have been shown the secret of better health and strength in keeping this tiny vital prostate gland active at the period in many men's lives when it becomes congested or inflamed.

FREE If You Act Now!

The results of this new method are so startling that the manufacturer will let you test it on 7 days' Free Trial. If it doesn't bring immediate relief—if it doesn't make you feel 10 years younger in 7 days—it will cost you nothing. Mail the coupon for details and Free copy of "Why Many Men Are Old at 40."

If you live west of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Building, Dept. 30-P, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address the Electro Thermal Co., Desk 30-P, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.



W. J. KIRK, President,
The Electro Thermal Co.,
9007 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

Send details of Free Trial and Free Copy of "Why Many Men Are Old at 40." No cost or obligation.

Name .....

Address .....

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MANY NEVER SUSPECT CAUSE OF BACKACHES

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief Of Pain

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

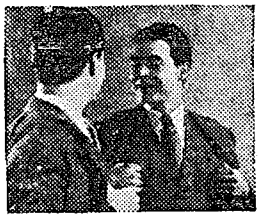
The kidneys are one of Nature's chief ways of taking the acids and waste out of the blood. If they don't pass 3 pints a day and so get rid of more than 3 pounds of waste matter, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may need flushing.

If you have trouble with frequent bladder passages with scanty amount which often smart and burn, the 15 miles of kidney tubes may need flushing out. This danger signal may be the beginning of nagging backache, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes and dizziness.

Don't wait for serious trouble. Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills — used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help flush out the 15 miles of kidney tubes. Get Doan's Pills.

Users Of GLOVER'S Laugh at DANDRUFF!

Glover's keeps your scalp clean as a whistle! No Dandruff, no Itching Scalp. Amazing, too, how it checks excessive Falling Hair, Bald Spots and promotes new hair growth. Use Glover's Mange Medicine regularly; shampoo with Glover's Medicated Soap. Sold by all druggists. Or have your Barber give you Glover's Treatments. For FREE LEAFLET, write to Glover's, 462 Fourth Avenue, New York.



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10¢ A DAY

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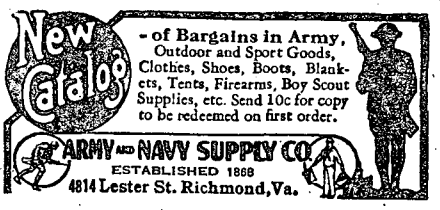
. . . STOPPED IN ONE MINUTE . . .

Are you tormented with the itching tortures of eczema, rashes, athlete's foot, eruptions, or other skin afflictions? For quick and happy relief, use Dr. Dennis' cooling, antiseptic, liquid **D.D.D. PRESCRIPTION.** Its gentle oils soothe the irritated skin. Clear, greaseless and stainless — dries fast. Stops itching instantly. A 35c trial bottle, at any drug stores, proves it—or money back.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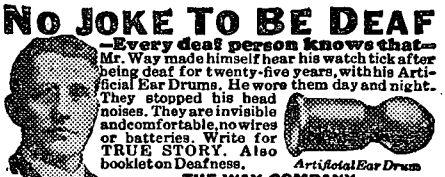

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The following are extracts from letters received, which are on file in our office; the complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

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The March

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

LAMPS

Standard Lamp Company Does Not Exist

A MAN who claims to be a representative of the Standard Lamp Co., 243 Madison Street, Chicago, is selling light bulbs guaranteed for a year, and with a guarantee, also, of reducing the light bill, at the same time increasing the amount of light. None of these claims are true. The bulbs stamped 100 watts consume from 180 watts to 225 watts, and ones stamped 150 watts consume 280 watts, therefore increasing instead of decreasing the light bill.

The lamps burn out quickly because of the inferior materials used in their manufacture and when they are returned to the manufacturer in accordance with the terms of the guarantee, the purchaser learns that there is no Standard Lamp Co. In fact, there is no such street address in Chicago as 243 Madison Street.

FRAUD

Vacation Racketeers Are Cashing In

WHEN you leave home on a vacation, or any kind of a trip, it is well to have some understanding with those you leave behind—your family, business associates or employees — concerning transactions which may come up in your absence. Remember, racketeers big and small watch the newspapers for going-away notices and the next day after you leave, a delivery boy may call at your home or office with a C. O. D. package that he says you ordered before you left.

Your wife or secretary may think it strange that you didn't mention it before leaving, but the amount is small, the boy is waiting, so they pay it and think no more about it. When you come home, you find the package contains a cheap fountain pen, a sleazy pair of socks or some other worthless article. This is another of the petty rackets which pays well.

CAPTURED

E. H. Reuter Gets Two Years

E. H. REUTER, whose exploits were outlined in the Sept. 5th issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, has been captured and sentenced to a two-year term in a Federal penitentiary. When his record was investigated, it was found that as "Edwin DeLong" he had previous-

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# of Crime

ly served a one-to-ten-year sentence in Joliet for operating a confidence game.

SEAL SKINS

Sub-Standard Coats Offered to Public

RETAILERS—and customers—should be on the watch for bargain sealskin coats which may be offered them. These are made from "rejected" Alaska seal skins from which the stamp has been removed.

These skins were of such poor quality that they were not allowed to be included in a group of U. S. Government seal skins sold at auction by the prescribed method, but some 2,300 of these "rejected" skins were sold to a New York City dealer to be used in making caps and were stamped "Rejects—for caps only." However, investigation reveals that coats were made of some of these skins and that the stamps had been obliterated. Genuine skins carry the Government stamp.

JAMES REED

Paper Bag Salesman On the Make

JAMES REED says he represents the National Bag & Novelty Co., 1228 North Jefferson St., Chicago. The Post Office Department has returned mail addressed to this company marked "Not Found." Reed takes orders and deposits for paper bags, tags, hangers, etc., which are not delivered. It is a safe rule not to pay *any* salesman in advance of delivery. If they are unwilling to trust you, why trust them?

FINANCIAL WATCH TOWER

George Graham Rice At It Again

URGING the purchase of shares of Sonotone Corporation in his tipster sheet, *The Financial Watch Tower,* George Graham Rice has caused that corporation to notify its stockholders that it had no knowledge of and was not responsible for these articles which were characterized as "exaggerated predictions."

Rice has long been identified with stock promotions and tipster sheets. *The Financial Watch Tower* has been in operation since the completion of Rice's federal prison term following his conviction on mail fraud charges in connection with the *Idaho Copper Corporation* stock swindle.

ROY KING

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FALSELY claiming to represent United Vineyards Company, Roy King accepts deposits on orders of wines and fruit juices, issuing fake receipts to his victims. Last heard of in the vicinity of Baltimore, he may call on you soon.

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"You!-Hands up!" the thin old voice rasped

By Norbert Davis

CHAPTER I

The Boy on the Dock

SLATTERY was carrying his trench coat folded over his left arm. He was carrying the bag with the hundred thousand dollars in it in his right hand. He slogged along the narrow path with a sort of weary determination, bent forward a little with the weight of the bag, swearing to himself in a grumbling monotone. Each footstep raised a little puff of dry, sandy dust that hung motionless in the thickly hot, humid air.

The pines were tall, darkly silent on both sides of the path. The underbrush was dry, brownish, artificial-looking. There was no sound anywhere at all, except the thud of Slattery's dragging feet and the slight creaking of the handles on the leather bag. Sweat stung Slattery's eyes, and he stopped to wipe his forehead with the palm of his left hand. Standing there, he looked around him slowly and cursed the woods and each individual tree, plant, and bush in them with a sadly bitter vehemence.

When he ran out of breath, he

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The Case of the Greedy Guardian

Slattery turned slowly toward the new menace

sighed drearily to himself and walked on again, grunting on each alternate step. He went around a sharply angling turn in the path and stopped short. He was looking right down on the lake. The water was a flat, motionless floor to the brazen ceiling of the sky, so brightly blue that it hurt his eyes.

On a Lonely, Hostile Isle, Deceit and Money and Dynamite Are the Weapons of a Scheming Madman

A dog growled warningly at him. Slattery looked down the bank at the lake's edge below him. The path ended there in a spindling little dock made of dry curling boards which extended out from the shore about ten feet. There was a small boy in blue overalls and a

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big straw hat sitting on the end of the dock with his feet hanging over the edge. His back was toward Slattery, and he didn't turn around.

The dog was sitting beside him. It was some sort of a cross-bred fox terrier, small and scrawny.

"Hi," said Slattery.

The small boy didn't move or say anything.

Slattery went slipping and sliding down the bank, stepped cautiously out on the dock. It creaked a little under his weight, then held steady.

"Hi, sonny," he said.

"Keep still," the boy ordered out of the corner of his mouth.

He was holding a bamboo pole that was patched here and there along its length with adhesive tape. A linen thread ran from the tip of the pole down to a flat round cork which floated on the surface of the water. He was watching the cork with tense concentration.

Slattery watched it, too, absent-mindedly scratching the fox terrier behind one floppy ear. The cork bobbed a little, sending out a quick widening circle of ripples. The boy's grip tensed on the pole. The cork bobbed again, and then again, and then became motionless. The ripples died.

"Hell," said the boy. He looked over his shoulder at Slattery reproachfully. "You scared him."

"Sorry," Slattery said. "Maybe he'll come back."

THE boy looked him over from head to foot. He saw a tall, thin man with a homely, big-boned face, a long nose that was bent a little to one side at the end, a wide, good-humored mouth, and wide-set grey eyes that had laughter glints deep back in them.

The boy relaxed. "Aw, that's all right. Guess he ain't hungry."

"Maybe not," Slattery agreed. He scratched the terrier under the chin. "Say, know where a guy by the name of Farr lives around this neck of the woods? He's got a place called Three Pines."

The boy nodded. "Sure. Over yonder."

He pointed straight out across the lake toward a blue hazy shimmer of trees and land.

"Which way is the shortest path around the lake?"

The boy moved the pole, dragging the cork carefully around to a new position in the water. "You could walk around this lake forty years, and you'd never get there. It's an island in the middle."

"Oh," said Slattery blankly. "How do you get there? How do visitors get to the place?"

"I don't wanta go there and they don't have no visitors. They don't want 'em. Not even this close. They shot at me the first couple times I fished here."

"*Shot* at you!" Slattery repeated incredulously. "What did you do?"

"Nothin'. Just sat."

"Oh," said Slattery respectfully. "You just—sat?"

"Sure. I got a right to fish here."

"That's one way of looking at it," Slattery agreed.

"Anyway the guy ain't a very good shot. He's got one of them government rifles, I think, and they're good for this far, only I don't think he knows how to gauge windage. Missed me more than ten feet every time. Scared my dog some."

"Oh," said Slattery. "Scared the dog." He nodded sympathetically at the terrier, and it sat back on its

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haunches and grinned approvingly up at him. "Well, I've got to get over there someway or other. How can I do it?"

"Boat," the boy said. He pointed down under the dock.

Slattery leaned over, peered into the dusty shadows. There was a flat-bottomed rowboat tied to one piling.

"Mine," said the boy.

Slattery nodded slowly. "How much to rent it? I might not come back today."

The boy looked Slattery over again, frowning slightly. "Free to you, mister. Leave it here when you get through. I can walk."

"Well, thanks," Slattery said gratefully.

He lay down flat on his stomach on the hot boards, reached around under the dock and untied the boat's painter, hauled the boat out into view. He lowered himself gingerly into it, put the bag of money carefully on the bottom. He sat down, found the oars, pushed away from the dock with one.

"So long."

The boy nodded gravely down at him. "So long."

CHAPTER II

Meet Karl

SLATTERY began to row slowly and evenly. The thole pins creaked and thumped, water swished from the oar blades in dripping semi-circles. The dock and the boy and the dog traveled slowly away from him.

"Hey, mister!" the boy called.

Slattery stopped rowing. "Yeah?"

"Can you swim?"

"I can, but I don't make a practice of it. Why?"

"There's a plug in the bottom. Sometimes it comes out."

Slattery looked down at the whittled pine plug in the bottom of the boat. Water bubbled around it in a thin, moving froth. Slattery sighed lengthily.

"Thanks for telling me," he said.

He rowed on again, swaying back and forth slowly with the movement of the oars. The dock and the boy and the dog grew smaller gradually, a little hazy.

The .45 automatic in Slattery's shoulder holster kept hitting the bicep of his left arm as he pulled on the oars. After awhile he got tired of it and stopped for a moment to take the automatic out of its holster and put it down carefully on the seat in front of him. He went on rowing slowly while the shore line faded into the blue-heat haze. The squeak, thump, swish of the oars made a sort of sleepy cadence.

There was a little blubbering cry. Slattery stopped rowing with a startled jerk, turned around. He was still about a half-mile from the island shoreline. He stared around him blankly, and then suddenly found a yellow spot in the blue of the water about twenty yards off to the left.

The blubbering cry was plainer this time. "Help!" A tanned arm slashed weakly beside the yellow spot, stirred a little white froth in the water.

"Hey!" said Slattery. "Hold it! I'm right with you!"

He swung the boat around clumsily, dug the oars in the water in rapid, jerky strokes, watching over his shoulder. As he came closer, the yellow spot turned into a short, thickly tangled mass of gold-colored hair around the tanned oval of a face. Blue eyes stared up at him, widely scared.

"Grab hold, sister!" Slattery said, extending an oar.

The girl caught the blade in a fran-

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tic lunge. Slattery stood up and hauled her in to the side of the boat. Both her hands came up, gripped the gunwale frantically tight. She had nice hands, tanned and small, with slim strong fingers. She was pretty, even now, when her lips were blue and pinched with cold, and her teeth chattered spasmodically.

"You're a long ways out." Slattery said. "What were you trying to do—swim across?"

She nodded, panting in broken gasps. "Yes. Would have made it. Only—water's too cold. Got cramp."

"Cramp!" Slattery said. "Where?"

"Both legs."

"Good night!" Slattery exclaimed. "Here. Let me help you in the boat!"

She shook her head, and the water swirled her yellow hair. "No, no!"

Slattery stared blankly. "Huh? Why not?"

"I—I haven't any clothes on."

The water was very clear. Slattery saw now that what she said was quite true.

"Uh!" he said, startled. "Well—are you a nudist or something?"

The blue lips tightened. "My bathing suit was pulling at my shoulders. I dropped it back about a quarter-mile."

"Oh," said Slattery. "Well, bathing suit or not, you can't stay in that water with cramps in your legs. I've got a trench coat you can wear. Come on!"

"No—"

Slattery got her by the arms just above the elbows, heaved back and up. She came over the side in a slithering rush. The boat rocked precariously, took water over one side, righted itself again. She huddled in the bottom, legs doubled back under her. Her lips were twisted, trembling. Tears made crusted streaks in the wetness of her face. She clawed feebly at the calves of her legs.

"Turn over on your stomach," Slattery ordered. "Go on."

She rolled over. She had long, straight, slimly rounded legs, deeply tanned. The muscles in both calves were bunched now into a lump the size of Slattery's fist, drawing her small, slim feet up tightly at the heels.

"This'll hurt," Slattery said.

He took hold of the calves of her legs, one in each hand, and suddenly dug his fingers into the cramped muscles with all his strength. The girl rolled back and forth in the bottom of the boat, beating at a thwart with her fists, making agonized little moaning noises. The cramped muscles suddenly let loose, relaxed under Slattery's fingers.

"Oh—!" the girl said breathlessly.

Slattery lifted her up, put her on one of the seats. He unfolded the trench coat, wrapped it tightly around her.

"Better?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

Slattery sat down again, facing her. "You've got plenty of the old moxie. I've seen lots of big, strong guys howl like Indians over one cramp, let alone two. That's kind of rough treatment I gave you, but it's the best way to fix them quick. You have to loosen the cramped muscle."

"I know. Thank—"

SHE stopped short, staring at Slattery's automatic. Slattery picked it up, put it back in his shoulder holster.

"Don't mind that. I just carry it for ballast."

"I—I never saw such a big automatic."

"It's an Army .45," Slattery said

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amiably. "I carry it because it makes so much noise when it goes off that it scares the guy I'm shootin' at to death even if I don't hit him, which I usually don't."

He leaned over and opened the bag he was holding between his feet on the bottom of the boat. The hundred thousand dollars was packed flat in it under his clean shirts and socks. It didn't show. Slattery came up with a round quart bottle of colorless liquid. He pulled out the cork, offered it to her.

"Better have a swig. It'll warm you up."

She took the bottle gingerly. "Thank you."

"Don't smell it before you drink. It's tequila. And go easy. It's pretty strong."

She tipped the bottle up, took one small swallow. She choked, coughing, her face twisting.

"Oh! Horrible!"

Slattery rescued the bottle. "It takes some getting used to, at that. Feel better now?"

"Y-yes, thank you. It *does* warm you up."

Slattery picked up the oars. "My name's Slattery. What's yours?"

"Gloria Farr."

Slattery stopped the oars in mid-stroke. "Gloria Farr! You old Daddy Farr's niece?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Slattery. "Well, well. I was just on my way to see your uncle."

Her blue eyes were wary suddenly, watchful. "You—you're the man from the Trust Company?"

"Yeah," Slattery said, digging in with the oars. "I better get you back to the island in a hurry. You need a nice hot shower, a couple more drinks, and a rest. You're going to have a pair of sore pins tomorrow."

"Yes," said Gloria Farr. "Yes. I guess—I may as well go back again."

Slattery rowed easily, swaying back and forth, taking deep, even strokes. Gloria Farr had stopped shivering, and her lips had regained some of their normal color. She looked very small, huddled in the folds of the trench coat, but she had a competent, firmly resolute air. She was watching Slattery thoughtfully, and after awhile she said:

"Thank you for—all you've done."

"Anybody would have done the same," Slattery said.

He turned to look over his shoulder. They were nearing the island shoreline, and he could see the thin line of white sand at the water's edge. He pulled harder on the oars. They slid up towards the beach.

There was a rumbling shout from off to their right. Slattery looked over his shoulder, still rowing. A man was standing on the beach about a hundred yards away. He was a squat, immensely wide outline with spindling bowed legs, long sloping shoulders that hunched forward, loosely dangling arms. His face was a black and white blur.

"Who's that?" Slattery asked.

"Karl," Gloria Farr said. "He's my uncle's servant—cook and house-boy and handy-man."

The thick man yelled incoherently and started plowing through the sand toward them, running clumsily on his short, bowed legs.

"What's eating him?" Slattery inquired.

"I don't know," Gloria Farr answered tightly.

Slattery ran the prow of the boat up on the sand, hopped out and pulled it

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higher. "Can you walk all right?" he asked.

She said: "Yes, thank you." She stepped carefully over the seats, out on the beach beside him.

CHAPTER III

The Vanishing Face

THE thick man arrived in a driving rush, spattering sand ahead of him. He had a short, bristly beard, blue-black, that covered half his face and gave the impression that he had no neck at all, that his small head sat directly on top of his wide shoulders. He had small colorless eyes, narrowed now into furious gleaming slits.

"You—you—" he said, thickly incoherent.

He swung a ham-like hand and hit Gloria Farr on the side of the face with his palm. The blow made a flat, popping sound, and the force of it whirled Gloria Farr clear around and knocked her sprawling on the sand on her side.

The thick man raised his foot to kick her, and then stared with bulging eyes. The trench coat had opened when she fell, and she was lying half-naked on the sand. The thick man stared for about a half-second, and then Slattery hit him.

Slattery took his time about it. He took two short steps forward and turned, bringing his whole arm around in a stiff swishing arc. His fist took the thick man just behind the ear.

The thick man's knees bent a little, and he went off sideways, staggering, waving his arms. He went knees-deep into the water before he could catch his balance, and then he straightened up with a raging bellow and charged Slattery.

Slattery had the .45 automatic in his hand, barrel raised a little. Without hurrying, he used his left hand to jerk the slide back, making a sharp, metallic double-click.

"Shoot him," Gloria Farr urged in a small, clear voice with a note of hatred in it.

The thick man stopped short, and his colorless little eyes stared widely at the automatic. He was still in the water over his shoe tops, and now he backed up a step, seeming to be trying desperately to think.

"Come right ahead," Slattery invited, very softly.

The thick man made a mumbling noise and backed up another step, still visibly cautious.

"'You! Hands up!'" Slattery turned slowly to look. The man who had spoken was standing back up the slope of the beach near the edge of the brush. He was a thin, scrawny little man wearing an old-fashioned linen duster that covered him completely from head to foot. He wore an immense white sombrero with a brim that looked to be a foot wide. He was holding a long-barreled bolt-action rifle aimed in Slattery's general direction. In spite of his age, he handled the gun capably.

"Hello, Mr. Farr," Slattery said calmly. "I'm Slattery—from the Mountain Trust. You're supposed to be expecting me."

The rifle muzzle jerked up, and then the little man was running down the beach toward them. Under the big sombrero he had a thin, hollow-cheeked face criss-crossed with a deeply interlaced pattern of wrinkles. He had a voice that was a high, thinly nasal whine.

"Mountain Trust! Why didn't you say so? What—"

"Call off your monkey," Slattery

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said: "Or I'll shoot him and skin him for a trophy."

"Karl!" Daddy Farr barked at the thick man. "What have you been doing?"

Karl grumbled in a sullen monotone, watching Slattery with dully malignant eyes.

"He hit Miss Gloria," Slattery said.

"Oh," said Farr, dismissing it with a shrug. "He was angry at her because I told him to watch her, and she ran away. Karl loses his temper easily."

"This time he almost lost something else," Slattery said.

Gloria Farr got up slowly from the sand, wrapping the coat around her. "Thank you, Mr. Slattery," she said. The prints of Karl's fingers stood out whitely on her cheek from his brutal blow.

"You!" said Farr suddenly, staring at her. "Why, you're—you're naked! You haven't any bathing suit on under that coat! Aren't you ashamed? Haven't you any decency, any self-respect?"

She stared at him silently for a moment. Her blue eyes looked very wide and dark, and there was a pulse hammering visibly in the hollow of her throat. She gathered the coat closer around her, turned around, and almost walked into the man who had come up behind her without making the slightest sound.

He was a young man, below medium height, with a round greasy face that was very darkly tanned. He wore a white suit, a dark shirt. He had a black, glistening mustache over redly pouting lips that were smiling a little now.

"Gloria, dear," he said in a voice that was a softly caressing whisper. "Are you all right?"

HE put out his hand toward her, but he didn't quite touch her, because Gloria Farr drew back quickly, and Slattery snapped the safety on his automatic. The dark man held his hand there in mid-air and looked sideways at Slattery. Slattery's face was woodenly expressionless, but he moved the automatic a little and the sun glistened dully blue on its barrel. There was a strained and awkward silence.

"Oh," said Farr. "This—this is Gravens, my secretary."

Slattery nodded amiably. Gloria Farr walked carefully around Gravens, on down the beach.

"This is Mr. Slattery, Gravens," Farr said. "The man from the Mountain Trust."

"Ah," said Gravens, and nodded politely.

Daddy Farr came closer to Slattery, tugged at his arm. "Did you bring it—did you?"

"Bring what?" Slattery asked.

Farr's wrinkled face writhed into a terribly eager grin. "The money, man! The hundred thousand dollars I sent for!"

Slattery looked at Farr, at Gravens, at Karl. They were all watching him with wolfishly tense faces. They moved in a little closer around him.

"Oh," said Slattery vaguely. "The money! No, I didn't bring it. Of course not."

Farr's mouth jerked. "Why not? Eh? Why not? My orders were plain enough, weren't they? I said I wanted a hundred thousand dollars in cash sent up here at once!"

"Sure," said Slattery. "Sure. But a hundred thousand is a lot of money, even to a Trust Company. They're not passing out sums like that unless they know where it's going and how

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it's going to get there. They sent me ahead to map out the route."

"Oh, the fools!" Farr exclaimed, jerking his thin body from side to side. "The stupid, blundering fools! They know I'm vested with complete discretion as Gloria Farr's uncle and guardian to handle every dime of her money! Why do they quibble? Why do they delay? I tell you time is vital!"

"Why the rush?" Slattery asked.

"There's no mystery about that," Gravens said softly. "Mr. Farr has the chance to buy a very choice piece of timberland up here. Several big lumber companies have been trying to get it for years. But the owner is a queer old character named Coogan who absolutely refused to consider an offer for it. That is, he did until Mr. Farr gained his confidence. The old fellow won't trust banks. He wants the cash—and at once. The timber will be a very excellent investment for Gloria. It's worth three times what Coogan is asking. We wanted to move quickly and secretly before any of the big lumber companies found out the old man is thinking of selling. They'd run up the price if they knew." He hesitated for a second, watching Slattery with wide brown eyes that had an oily sheen to them. "Are you *sure* you didn't bring the money with you?"

"Why, hell, yes!" Slattery said emphatically. "You don't think anybody would trust me with a hundred thousand dollars, do you? If I ever got my mitts on that much I'd hike for the nearest border!"

"I read a feature article in a newspaper about you once," Gravens said in the same soft voice. "I remembered it, because it said that you were the highest bonded employee of the Mountain Trust Company. It said you were bonded for a half-million dollars, and because of the type of your duties and the discretion invested in you, the company had to pay about five times the normal amount for your bond. Now a hundred thousand it only a fraction of half a million. The Trust Company wouldn't lose anything if you ran out with it. They'd just collect from the Bonding Company.

"Hah!" said Slattery. "You think so! You should read that bond. It's got more *ifs* and *ands* and *whereases* in it than you ever saw. It covers lots of things, but it sure stops short when it comes to me running around loose in the weeds with a hundred thousand in my pants pocket. It doesn't cover anything like that."

"So?" said Gravens politely.

"Well—well, when *can* they get it here?" Farr demanded.

"Couple hours after I phone in my report," Slattery said. "They'll fly it up in a plane, probably land in the lake."

"Uh!" Farr said petulantly. "Well—well, all right!"

"Shall we go to the house?" Gravens asked quietly.

"Eh?" said Daddy Farr, looking at him blankly. "Well, why? He wants to go back, phone in—"

"I think we'd better go to the house first," Gravens said.

"Oh!" said Farr. "Oh, well—yes. Surely!"

"Mr. Slattery is probably very tired," Gravens said, smiling. "A few hours won't make any great difference."

"I *am* tired," Slattery said promptly. "In fact, I'm nearly dead. I had to sit up all night on that dinky little putt-putter they claim is a train, and I had to walk seven miles after I got off, and then row myself a couple more."

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HE stepped into the boat, picked up the black bag from the floor boards. The three men on the beach were watching the bag speculatively. Slattery hefted it, changed it over to his left hand, took a firm grip on the handles.

"All right," he said easily. "Lead the way."

"Yes," Daddy Farr said in a thoughtful tone, taking his eyes away from the bag with a distinct effort. "Yes, of course. Would you mind coming this way?"

He started off up the beach the way Gloria Farr had gone. Gravens and Karl waited, watching Slattery.

Slattery jerked his head. "Go ahead."

Farr turned around. "Oh—ah—you wouldn't object if Karl locked up your boat in the boat house, would you? It's just down the beach around that point."

"Why lock it up?" Slattery asked.

Farr wiggled his thin body inside the linen duster. "Well," he said, embarrassed. "It—it's my niece. You know why I brought her up here?"

"No," Slattery said.

Farr drew a line in the sand with the toe of his shoe. "Well—it's an awful thing to have to say about one's brother's child. But—she's absolutely immoral. This business of swimming without the bathing suit was typical of her actions. I have no doubt that she took it off when she saw you rowing near her. I brought her up here because I caught her making love with the man who tended our furnace in the city." Farr's wrinkled face twisted, and he shook the heavy rifle in front of him. "An ash-man! That was really too much! I've had constant trouble with her before, but I couldn't stand that!"

"It's probably some mental maladjustment," Gravens said silkily. "I think she'll outgrow it. She's still very young, you know, and her parents both died when she was a baby."

"Ummm!" said Slattery thoughtfully.

Farr looked at him sharply. "Did she try to make love to you?"

"Not that I noticed," Slattery said.

"She will," Farr said. "If she gets the chance. I'll try to keep her away from you, but in any event you'll be prepared."

"Yeah," said Slattery.

"You don't mind about the boat?"

Slattery shook his head. "Nope."

"All right. Come this way."

Farr turned around again and started walking. Slattery jerked his head at Gravens, indicating he was to go first. Gravens smiled knowingly, looking from the bag to Slattery's face. He chuckled softly, followed after Farr. Slattery waited for a second, then said to Karl in a flatly metallic voice:

"Listen, dog-face. Don't make any more funny moves in my direction. If you even so much as wiggle your ears at me again, I'm going to start a little Fourth of July celebration all of my own." He raised the automatic meaningly. "Catch on?"

Karl's dull little eyes wavered. "Yes—sir," he said in a thick mumble.

"Remember," said Slattery.

He walked quickly after Farr and Gravens. He had gone about ten yards and was catching up to them when he saw the face watching him from the brush. Only the face was visible, like something disembodied, moving a little as the bony jaws chomped on something that bulged the thin, weathered cheeks. The face had a little goat-like beard and wide, bulg-

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ing blue eyes. The eyes were centered greedily on the bag Slattery was carrying in his hand.

Slattery stopped short. "Hey!" he said loudly.

The face disappeared instantly. There was no noise, not even the slightest movement of the brush where it had been. It was just not there any more.

Slattery swallowed hard, staring. Gravens and Farr had stopped at his shout, were looking back at him.

"What is it?" Farr called.

"I just saw somebody in the brush," Slattery said.

Gravens shook his head, a little pityingly. "You couldn't have, Mr. Slattery. There's no one on the island but Mr. Farr, myself, you, Karl and Gloria. It's very small. Perhaps the sun. It's very glaring here near the water . . ."

"Yeah," said Slattery. "Lead on."

CHAPTER IV

Storm Clouds

THE house was back hidden in the trees. It looked like a motion picture set representing a hunting lodge. It was long and low and rambling, built of halved logs with the bark still on them. The dark shadows of the pines were thick and gloomy around it, and the lake breeze rustled the brush in sly, dry whisperings.

Daddy Farr and Gravens went up the two steps to the low porch and waited there for Slattery to join them.

"Would you like a little something to eat?" Gravens asked silkily.

Slattery nodded. "Yeah, I'm hungry as hell."

Gravens smiled. "All right. Karl is our cook. He'll fix something up for you as soon as he comes."

"Karl, huh?" said Slattery thoughtfully. "I guess maybe I'm not so hungry after all. I'd like to take a little nap instead. Is there any place I can lie down?"

"Certainly," said Farr. "Show him, Gravens."

"This way," Gravens said.

Slattery followed him through the wide doorway. It was an immense living room, higher inside than the house looked to be, with a balcony running clear around it. There was a big natural stone fireplace on the far side with a pile of neatly quartered logs beside it. Gravens and Slattery went single file up a flight of stairs, part way around the balcony. Gravens went through an open door, down a short, dark hall with Navajo rugs on the floor that were streaked jaggedly white and red. He opened a door at the end of the hall.

"This bedroom is ready. You won't be disturbed here. There's no one else in this wing."

Slattery went into a room that had a low-beamed ceiling, unfinished pine furniture that was low and comfortable-looking. There was a wide bed on one side, under the small window set aslant in the sloping wall.

"The bathroom is next door," Gravens said. "Would you like anything else? Can I get you a drink?"

"No, thanks," Slattery said.

"Then good-by—for awhile," Gravens said softly. He backed out of the room, closed the door behind him noiselessly.

Slattery waited, listening to the creak of his footsteps going down the hall. He was still holding the bag with the money in it tightly in his left hand. After a moment he walked over to the door, looked at it carefully. The door had a lock, but there was no key in it.

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"Huh!" Slattery said absently to himself.

He went back and sat down on the bed, sinking into its softness with a long, relieved sigh. He opened the bag, took out his bottle of tequila, and took a big swallow of it. He choked, shuddering, gasping for breath. When he had recovered himself, he took another swig and went through the same procedure over again. He corked the bottle, put it back in the bag, closed it and snapped the catches. He put the bag carefully between his feet on the floor.

He found a limp cotton sack of tobacco and a package of brown papers in his coat pocket and started to roll himself a cigarette with casual ease. He raised the cigarette to lick the flap shut and stopped with his mouth open, watching the door.

The knob was turning very slowly and silently. Slattery slowly lowered the cigarette, holding it in his left hand. He reached inside his coat with his right, brought out the .45 automatic. He balanced it carefully in his hand.

The knob clicked, and then suddenly the door flipped open and Gloria Farr slipped inside the room, shut the door quickly behind her. She leaned against it, breathing hard, watching him with widely blue eyes.

SLATTERY swallowed noisily and lowered the automatic. "Better knock next time," he said slowly. "I damned near shot through the door. I'm getting a little jumpy."

"I'm—sorry," she said in a low voice. "I didn't want to make any noise. I didn't want my uncle to know I was here. He forbade me to see you."

"Oh," said Slattery aimlessly. "I see."

Her face seemed to grow darker and smaller, and her mouth was a thin red line. "Did he tell you anything about me?"

"Well," Slattery said uneasily. "In a way—yes."

"I know. He told you about me—being immoral. Didn't he?"

"Yup," Slattery admitted.

"Do you believe that?"

"Hell, no," said Slattery, grinning at her.

She relaxed. "I'm sorry. I should have known you wouldn't. You—you're a pretty decent sort, aren't you?"

"Well," said Slattery. "There's some argument about that. You could find people who wouldn't agree with you at all. But I just figured your uncle was sort of a nut on the subject, and I didn't pay much attention to him."

"A nut!" she repeated thinly. "That's putting it—kindly! You know how he's played up in the newspapers. 'Daddy' Farr! The kind, rich old gentleman who loves little children. Who is always giving dinners for orphans and news-boys and crippled children. That's the side the public sees and hears. But I never do! All I see is a nasty, snarling, hateful little mind! He hates me. He hated my mother—tried to keep my father from marrying her. It's been a hell for me ever since I was old enough to understand. Everything I say he twists around to give another meaning. He watches me constantly, peeping, prying, spying. Sometimes I think I can't stand it—even for another year. I'll come of age, then, and I'll be free of him. But—but it seems sometimes like I can't last it out. Like this morning, when I tried to run away—swim the lake . . ."

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"Uh-huh," Slattery said sympathetically.

"He brought me up here to keep me away from everyone. He never would let me go out with young people. Here Karl watches me all the time."

"He isn't what I'd call a high-class guardian for a girl," Slattery observed slowly. "Not the way he acted this morning."

"That isn't the first time he's hit me," she said.

"No?" said Slattery, frowning. "Well, maybe I better have another little session with him."

"He—he's terribly strong."

"Uh-huh. But I'm awful tough. Where does the greasy gravy gent come in?"

"Gravens? My uncle wants me to marry him." Her face twisted suddenly into a disgusted grimace. "He's what my uncle considers an upstanding young man."

"Well, either your uncle's wrong, or I am," Slattery said.

She hesitated, listening. "I've got to go now. I—I just wanted to talk to you. If I stay longer they'll miss me, and if they find me here they'll—they'll say . . ."

"Not to me, they won't," Slattery said grimly.

"Thank you. Good-by."

She opened the door, slipped quietly through it into the hall. She closed the door noiselessly. Slattery sat motionless on the bed, scowling thoughtfully. He licked his cigarette, twisted the ends, lit it. He smoked it down to a short stub, still scowling, then got up and ground out the butt in a copper bowl on the dresser. He took a straight-backed chair from one corner, braced it carefully under the door knob. Going back to the bed, he threw the pillow on the floor, replaced it with the black bag. He lay down on his back on the bed, resting his head on the bag. He put the .45 on his chest and folded both hands over it. He went to sleep in about five minutes. . . .

CHAPTER V

Battle in the Woods

SLATTERY woke up all at once and sat up straight in bed with a startled jerk. The .45 automatic slid off his chest, thudded heavily on the floor beside the bed. Slattery rolled over and grabbed it blindly, and then sat up again, blinking around him. It was dark in the room.

"Good gosh!" Slattery mumbled, digging at his eyes with the knuckles of his left hand. "I can't have slept this long—"

He fumbled the cheap watch out of his pocket, stared incredulously at the luminous dial. He had slept this long. It was after eight o'clock.

Slattery slung his feet over the edge of the bed, pushed himself forward. The shot came, then. It sounded as though it were right below him. Right after it there was a thump that shook the walls a little, and then a dragging clatter of sound.

Daddy Farr's high, whining voice screamed: "Gravens! Gravens! What—" His feet made noise pounding across the living room, and then his voice shrieked on a frantically hysterical note: "Murder! Murder! Help—"

Slattery jumped off the bed, slammed across the room. He kicked the chair out of the way, jerked the door open. The hall was empty, dark, but there was light coming from the door to the left that opened out on the balcony around the living room.

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Slattery ran that way, burst out on the balcony, and stared down into the living room. Reading lamps threw deeply greenish pools of light over the two soft leather chairs on either side of the big stone fireplace. But there was no one in the room.

Daddy Farr was screaming again. "Murder! Help! Karl!"

Slattery ran around the balcony, down the stairs. He slipped on the soft rug at the bottom, righted himself, and ran to the big front door. It was wide open and so was the screen door that backed it. Slattery went out on the front porch.

There was a light on the porch, at the front, over the two shallow steps that led up from the path below. On the path, just inside the circle of light, there was a figure sprawled flat on its face on the ground. The figure wore Daddy Farr's old-fashioned linen duster and Daddy Farr's big white sombrero. But it was not Daddy Farr lying there, because Daddy Farr was sitting on his heels beside the sprawling figure, rocking back and forth and screeching insanely.

Slattery jumped down the steps, ran forward. "Here! What's this? What—"

Farr stopped his screaming and stared at him with eyes that bulged widely out of the wrinkled smear of his features. "It's Gravens! Somebody shot him! Shot him!"

Slattery knelt down beside the sprawling figure, gently turned it over on its back. The round, darkly greasy face of Gravens stared up at him. Gravens' thickly pouting lips were open slackly, and his brown eyes were very wide, very glassy, and quite dead.

There was a little black hole squarely between the eyes, and blood that looked black and thick had slid down over one cheek in a lacy, criss-crossed pattern.

"What happened?" Slattery asked softly.

Farr glared wildly at him. "They meant to shoot me! You see? He's wearing the hat and coat I always wear. In the dark they thought it was me, and they shot him!"

"What happened?" Slattery repeated.

Farr swallowed hard. "We—were reading there by the fireplace. I—I asked him if he would go down and take a look at the boat house to make sure that Karl locked it like I told him to. So he got up and said it was a little cool down by the lake and he thought he'd get his coat and hat. So I told him to take mine. He put them on and went out the door. And there was a shot, and I heard him stagger down the steps and fall. I ran out here. . . ."

Slattery carefully worked the big white hat off Gravens' head. He held the hat up into the light. The bullet had not penetrated. Slattery lowered the head again, looked curiously at the hat. His eyes narrowed suddenly. He looked at where his fingers were holding the hat on the brim and then looked down at Gravens.

"Huh!" he said absently. He put the hat down on Gravens' dead face and stood up.

"I tell you they thought it was me!" Farr said hysterically. "Somebody heard about that money you were supposed to bring, and they were waiting—"

Slattery stiffened. "Money!" he choked.

He whirled around and jumped back up on the porch, slammed through the front door.

"Don't go!" Farr shrieked. "Don't leave me—"

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SLATTERY was going up the stairs to the balcony three at a time. He hit the top, whirled around the balcony, in through the door that opened on the short hall. He ran down the hall, skidding on the rugs, kicked the door of his bedroom open wide.

There wasn't much light in the room, and the shadows seemed to move slowly with the rustle of the pine trees outside. But there was enough light for Slattery to see that the bag with the hundred thousand dollars in it wasn't on his bed any longer.

Slattery grunted breathlessly. "That does it!" he said thickly.

The small window over the bed was open, the curtain moving a little in the night breeze from the lake. Slattery got to the bed in two long jumps, landed in the middle of it on his hands and knees. The screen on the window was slit parallel with the base and ripped loose along the bottom.

Slattery pushed it back, peered down at the ground. There was another window on the ground floor directly below his, and a little light came palely through it. Just enough light to show a weathered goat-bearded face peering up at him with its thin jaws chomping busily on something. Just enough light to reflect slickly black from the smooth sides of the leather bag.

"Stop!" Slattery yelled breathlessly.

The bag and the face jerked out of the light in that uncannily silent way. Slattery fired down into the shadows where it had disappeared three times. The big gun smashed hard against the heel of his hand. The reports hammered in a confused roar of sound. The glass in the window rattled a little.

Slattery crawled right straight through the window. It was too narrow to turn around in, and he dropped head first toward the ground as soon as his legs cleared the sill. He managed to turn partly around in the air and came down hard on his left side with a jar that numbed his whole body.

He staggered dizzily to his feet, fighting to get a breath. He was out of the yellow swath of light that came from the window now, and it was as though a thick black blanket had been clapped tightly over his eyes. All around him branches rustled in sly, quiet murmurings.

Slattery plunged into the brush, heading diagonally away from the house. He threshed his way straight ahead for about twenty yards. Branches flicked across his face like sharp cutting little whips, dragged at his legs. He tripped over a hidden log and fell flat on his face. Dust from the thick carpet of pine needles choked him, and he seized his throat with his left hand to keep from coughing.

He got up to his knees and stayed there for a moment, listening. There was noise far off to his left. Brush crackled faintly. Slattery got up and ran blindly that way, protecting his eyes by holding his left arm in front of his face. He bumped into trees invisible in the darkness, stumbled over hidden obstacles, but he kept his head down, kept his legs moving, kept on driving stubbornly ahead through the darkness.

He was getting closer to the noise. He could hear it even above the sound of his own progress. There was the heavy thud of shuffling feet now. But the feet didn't seem to move. They stayed right in the same place, and as Slattery slowed a little, trying to stare through the brush, he could hear the sound of breathing — heavy, labored breathing. And then the flat plopping noise of bare fists hitting flesh.

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Slattery kicked through another clump of brush and then stopped short, widening his eyes in incredulous, unbelieving amazement.

It was a little clearing in the woods covered over with an ankle-high carpet of dry brush. There was a moon now, fat and red on the horizon, and its ghostly thin light showed the two men fighting in the middle of the clearing.

They fought silently, viciously, savagely, without any words or any pauses. They were slugging at close quarters in a sort of blind frenzy.

One of the men was Karl. Slattery recognized the wide sloping shoulders, the long ape-like arms, the spindling bowed legs. The other man was taller, straighter, but with shoulders just as wide. This second man wore no clothes except for a tight pair of shorts that were the same color as his tanned body.

Slattery gaped in dazed wonder. The tall man was driving Karl straight back across the clearing, pounding one chopping blow after another into the bearded face. Karl tried to guard, tried to hit back, but he was clumsily helpless against the other man's lithe quickness, his savage determination. They were at the edge of the clear now, and the shadows there seemed to reach for them hungrily.

Karl stumbled a little. He was facing Slattery, and Slattery could see the bruised raw mass of his face over the black beard, see the dull little eyes bulging in strangled terror. He managed to duck under one of the tall man's blows, suddenly dove forward, arms outstretched.

The arms clasped tight around the tall man's waist, and Slattery saw Karl's thick fingers lock together behind the bare, smoothly muscled back. Karl made a thickly grunting noise of triumph. His arms seemed to swell like thick snakes as he squeezed the tall man against him.

CHAPTER VI

Dynamite

SLATTERY started forward and then stopped again. The tall man's long body seemed suddenly to be a sharply etched outline of corded muscle. He had bent backwards under Karl's sudden lunge, but now he began to straighten up. The muscle writhed and bunched across his wide shoulders, along his back. He had his hands gripped behind Karl's back in just the same back-breaking hold that Karl had on him. And now under the tremendous pressure of Karl's thick arms, he began to arch his back.

Karl's breath whistled in his throat. His eyes were like bulging red-veined marbles. His mouth was wide open in the black bristle of his face. He was bending slowly over backwards. He screamed suddenly—a thin, mewling note of horror. He let go of the tall man, tried to squirm free.

The tall man dropped him suddenly. Karl staggered backwards, and in that second the tall man caught him. He picked up Karl's thick body clear up off the ground, whirled and bent over. Karl went sailing through the air back toward Slattery like some monstrous, flapping bird. He hit the ground on his head, and there was a dully muffled crack. The tall man staggered a little, catching his balance, and then walked towards him. He didn't even see Slattery. He bent over Karl, turned him over roughly.

"Nice work," Slattery said. "He needed—"

He didn't get a chance to say any-

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thing more. The tall man reached him in two incredibly quick jumps, flung his doubled fist forward in a looping right. The fist was a white-knuckled smear in front of Slattery's eyes. He ducked instinctively, got down far enough to take the blow on his forehead.

It felt like the whole world had suddenly flipped over and dropped on his head. He tripped and went sprawling backwards in a dim, red-shot haze that flickered crazily in front of him. He had only time to feel the jar as his shoulders hit the ground, and then the tall man dropped on his chest with both knees and long, thick fingers gripped his throat and clamped down like a living vise. Slattery's eyes popped under the pressure.

He writhed back and forth on the ground, managed to jerk his right arm free of the tall man's crushing weight. He jammed the muzzle of the .45 hard into the tall man's bare, muscled stomach. His thumb found the safety lever on the gun, pushed it off with a sharply metallic click.

The tall man froze, kneeling on top of him. Slattery pushed harder with the automatic. The tall man's thick fingers loosened slowly on his throat.

Slattery coughed painfully. "All right—Tarzan," he said in a thick mumble. "Back off, or I'll blow you down."

The tall man got up off him very slowly. "Oh! I—I thought you were Gravens. . . ."

Slattery sat up, still keeping the automatic leveled, and rubbed his throat gingerly with his left hand. "I'm not—I'm happy to say. Gravens is lying back by the lodge, deader than a pickled herring."

"Dead?" the tall man exclaimed incredulously.

"Uh-huh. Shot right through the bean."

"Who—who shot him?"

"I don't know," Slattery said. "But now that we're on the subject, just who the hell are you and what're you doing running around here half-naked?"

"My name is Burks—Tod Burks. I swam across from the mainland to see Gloria."

"Huh!" said Slattery, amazed. "Why?"

"Because I love her!" Burks said angrily. "They brought her up here to get her away from me! They didn't think I'd have money enough to follow her, but I sold all my books and instruments and pawned half my clothes, and I came!"

"Well, I'll be damned," said Slattery faintly.

"I'm camping across the lake in a pup tent I borrowed from my roommate. I swim across every night and wait for her to duck out of the house. She couldn't get out tonight. They had her locked in, but I climbed up to her window and talked to her awhile. She told me Karl had hit her, and I hunted him up. I told him before what I was going to do to him if he ever laid a hand on her again. I meant just what I said."

"I guess you did," Slattery said soberly. "I heard something pop when you dumped him, and I think it was his neck."

Burks whirled around to stare at Karl's thick, motionless body. "Neck! You mean . . ."

Slattery pushed himself up off the ground, grunting with the effort, and walked over to Karl. He leaned over the lumpy, inert body.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "It *was* his neck. He's dead."

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"Dead!" said Burks. "But I didn't mean . . ."

Slattery nodded. "I know. It was self-defense. I can swear to that. He was sure tryin' his best to break your back when I came on the scene. He would have if he could. I'd sure hated to have him get hold of me like he had you. You carry around a lot of power, boy."

Burks was staring down at Karl with a sick, nauseated expression on his tanned face. "You get that — shoveling coal," he said absently.

Slattery looked up. "Shoveling coal?"

BURKS nodded. "Yes. I'm an engineering student. I've been working my way through school tending people's furnaces. That's how I met Gloria. I was taking care of their furnace—"

"*You're* the ash-man!" Slattery said.

Burks nodded again. "That's what Farr called me. He said I was after Gloria's money! As if I'd—"

"Money!" Slattery said, gasping. "Good gosh! I forgot it again! Listen, did you see a little goat-bearded gent with a black bag running around here?"

Burks stared at him. "What?"

Slattery made an impatient gesture. "I know it sounds screwy! I can't help that. There is such a guy carrying such a bag. And the bag is full of Gloria Farr's money. I figured he'd head for the boat house. Come on."

He plunged into the brush again with Burks trotting lightly after him. He slid down the bank of a steep little gully, crashed through the brush along its bottom, came out suddenly on the beach. He stopped short, looking both ways.

About a hundred yards to their right, there was a low flat structure a few feet up from the water's edge.

"That'll be it," Slattery said.

He plowed heavily through the deep sand. Burks ran easily and lightly beside him. The moon, higher up now, threw grotesquely jiggling black shadows ahead of them, and the water of the lake was a cold, still-gleaming green.

Ten yards from the boat house, Slattery dug his heels in the sand and stopped short. One of the wide doors was open, sagging drunkenly on a broken hinge.

"He got here first," Slattery said tightly.

He walked slowly up to the door, the big automatic held hip-high in front of him. The interior of the boat house was a thick square of blackness. Slattery peered vainly past the door, trying to pierce the gloom. He fumbled a match out of his pocket.

"I don't know how many boats there are—"

He snapped the match on his thumb nail, held the spurting yellow flame over his head. It wavered suddenly in his fingers, then steadied again.

Burks looked in over his shoulder, said at last, in a sick voice, "He's dead?"

The little man with the goat beard was dead. He was lying on the half-board floor with his head propped up against the side of the boat. The boat was painted white, and the little man's head, lolling against it, had left a great bloody smear. A heavy bloody hammer lay beside the body.

The little man lay there, looking unwinkingly back at the light. He looked very small and in some way pathetically childish in spite of the wrinkled, weathered cheeks and the little beard.

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Slattery didn't have to answer Burks' question.

The black bag was turned upside down on the ground beside him, and Slattery's shirts and socks were scattered helter-skelter over the sand-drifted boards. Slattery could see into the bag from where he stood. It was quite empty. And there was no money visible anywhere on the floor.

"Why!" Burks said suddenly, peering more intently. "That's old Coogan!"

The match burned Slattery's fingers, and he flicked it away from him. "What? Do you know him?"

"I know of him," Burks explained slowly. "Everybody does around here. He's a character, an old trapper, a little touched in the head. Claims to own all this country through here because he used to trap over it years ago. Of course, he doesn't."

"Coogan," Slattery muttered to himself. "Coogan. Where have I heard—hey! That's the guy Farr was going to buy some timberland from!"

Burks stared at him incredulously. "Why—why, he doesn't own any land! Everybody knows that! This land all around here belongs to the government."

"Well, what the hell?" Slattery queried in a puzzled tone. He stiffened suddenly. "Say! I'm going back to the lodge and talk to Farr. I've got a lot of questions I want that old boy to answer!"

"I'll go with you," Burks said quietly.

They started back up the beach. About twenty yards from the boat house, Slattery kicked a short yellow stick out of the sand. He leaned over curiously and picked it up.

"What's this?" he asked, holding it to the other man.

"It's dynamite," Burks answered calmly.

Slattery made a startled, choking noise and held the stick at arm's length away from him. "What—what—?"

Burks reached for it, looked at it closely. "It's a half-stick. See where it's been cut?" He took the stick in both hands and twisted it.

"Hey!" Slattery said, alarmed. "Watch out!"

"There's no danger," Burks replied absently. He kicked around in the sand, uncovered several more short sticks.

"Good gosh!" Slattery exclaimed, backing up rapidly.

Burks was examining a couple of the other sticks. "They've been cooked. See how soggy they are?"

"Cooked!" Slattery repeated. "You don't mean somebody eats—"

"No, no! Dynamite is made of nitro-glycerine. That's the explosive in it. It's a liquid in its pure form. It's diluted in dynamite. Someone cooked this to get the concentrated explosive. It's a dangerous thing to do."

"I should think maybe," Slattery agreed. "Say, I'm beginning to see. . . . Coogan, the dynamite, Gravens, the money—"

"Tod! Tod!"

CHAPTER VII

Sharpshooter

GLORIA FARR came running down the beach toward them. She was wearing blue silk pajamas, a blue bath-robe pulled tightly around her waist. She was barefooted. Burks ran to meet her, swung her up easily in his arms. "Gloria, dear!"

She was panting heavily, sobbing a little in breathless gasps. "I—broke

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down the door with a chair. I couldn't stay there alone any longer. I heard the shot and uncle screaming. And when I got out I found Gravens lying there, dead. What—what is it? What's been happening? What's been happening?"

"Plenty," Slattery answered grimly. "I'm beginning to get the answers now. You see, the Mountain Trust thought it was funny your uncle wanted all that dough sent clear up here in secret and in a hurry. Farr was given complete control of it in your father's will, but we looked into it anyway. We found out the old man has made a lot of screwy investments with his own money. He's been losin' right and left, and right now he hasn't hardly a dime of his own to jingle in his pants.

"Well, I think he decided to begin on your dough. First, he got the idea of marrying you to Gravens, but that didn't work out so well, so he got a new idea."

Burks said uncertainly: "You mean . . .?"

Slattery shrugged. "I don't know, of course, but I'm guessing that he meant to knock Coogan on the head and then use the nitro to blow up the house with him in it. You couldn't identify the body if it was blown to pieces and the house burned over it. It would be assumed that Farr was the guy that got it—if he disappeared. Everybody would think the dough was stolen or blown up with him. About Gravens—I'm guessing again—but I think he was in the way. Farr didn't care to split with him. So he shoots him and tries to make it look like somebody is gunning for Farr and got Gravens by mistake. That's really what tipped me off. Gravens was supposed to be shot because he was wearing Farr's hat and coat. But the hat was on backwards."

"What?" Burks said blankly.

"I took Farr's hat off Gravens. It was on backwards. A man putting on a strange hat invariably looks inside to see which is the front and which is the back. You see, Farr meant to take the dough and skip. Coogan would disappear at the same time, and if there was any blame passed around, everybody would think the poor old screw-loose did it all. Nobody would be looking for Farr. As I said, that's just guessing, but I'll bet I'm pretty close."

"You are," said Daddy Farr. "You're pretty close."

He was standing just in front of the boat house. The shadow cut him off at the waist and made it look like there was just half a body suspended there motionless in the air. His wrinkled face was twisted into a terribly fixed, malignant grin. He had a quart bottle in his right hand, raised back over his shoulder. The bottle was partially filled with sluggishly gleaming liquid.

"The nitro-glycerine!" Burks said in a numb whisper.

"Oh, yes!" Daddy Farr said, and he laughed on a high, whinnying note. "You were perfectly correct, my dear Slattery!" He brought his arm down in a smooth arc, hurled the bottle of explosive straight at the three of them.

Slattery jerked his automatic up to try a snap-shot at the bottle, knowing even as he moved that there was no possible chance of him hitting it. But before he could raise the muzzle, there was a thin whip-like crack. The whole world seemed to split wide open in one thundering blast of sound that shook the ground under their feet. A great hand slapped Slattery all along the length of his body, pushed him through the air. He was slammed back onto

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the sand, and a crazy circle of red flares seemed to chase around and around inside his head.

His chest was pushed flat against the ground, and he choked and coughed, trying to get air into his lungs. Faintly through the booming in his ears, he could hear Tod Burks saying anxiously:

"Gloria! Gloria! Are you all right?"

Her voice said: "Y-yes. . . ."

"Hello, mister," another thin voice called.

SLATTERY forced his numb muscles to respond, slowly pushed himself into a sitting position. A figure materialized out of the red glare that blinded him. It was the boy he had met fishing on the pier that morning. He was standing over Slattery, staring down at him soberly. He was carrying a short-barreled .22 rifle in the crook of his arm.

Slattery gasped unbelievingly: "You—you—"

The boy nodded gravely. "I was watchin'. I shot the bottle before it left his hand. I didn't know it would blow up!"

Slattery looked around. Tod Burks was kneeling beside Gloria Farr, helping her to sit up. Slattery looked at the place where Daddy Farr had stood. There was a shallow, wide hole blasted in the sand. The boat house was flattened right down to the beach, as though some gigantic heel had stamped down on it, ground it into splinters. Slattery shivered a little and looked quickly away.

"How—how did you get here?" he asked blankly.

"With my uncle—Nick Coogan," the boy said. "And he's not crazy either! He's—he's just a little funny because he stayed alone so much when he was trappin'."

"Sure," Slattery said gently.

"Farr killed him," the boy said, swallowing hard. "I heard Uncle Nick yell, but I was too far away to help, so I waited in the brush for Mr. Farr to come out of the boat house. . . . Uncle Nick was pretty good to me! He—" He sobbed suddenly, a dryly harsh, gasping sound that he tried to choke down in his throat.

Slattery got up unsteadily, put his arm around the boy's shoulders. "You did just right! Believe me, you did! Come on, let's get away from here."

"There's no boats," the boy said. "They're all smashed to pieces. Mine was tied behind the boat house. The explosion has sunk it. The one I lent you was inside the boat house. Uncle Nick broke in to get it."

"I'll swim back," Tod Burks said. "I'll send somebody over to pick you up."

"I'm going with you!" said Gloria Farr.

"All right," Burks said, smiling at her. "I'll tow you."

She fumbled at the cord on her bathrobe. "Will you look the other way for a moment, Mr. Slattery? I still haven't got—"

"Well, here now," Slattery objected uncomfortably. "Maybe you shouldn't. . . ."

Gloria Farr laughed a little unsteadily. "Don't worry, Mr. Slattery. Tod and I have been married for four months. We didn't tell my uncle because he would have had the marriage annulled."

"Oh," said Slattery blankly. He turned his back.

There was a little pause, and then a quick double splash in the water.

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"Good-by," Gloria Farr called.

Slattery turned to look. Their heads were shadowed blobs on the smoothness of the water, close together. As he watched, Burks struck out effortlessly in a slow slashing crawl. Gloria Farr's head bobbed along evenly beside him.

"Well," sighed Slattery, looking uneasily at the scooped-out hole in the sand. "I guess I'll have to poke around and see if I can't find a few shredded bills to take back with me."

"Bills?" said the boy. "You mean the money? I've got all that."

Slattery whirled to look at him. "What did you say?"

"I took the money out of the bag. I made Uncle Nick open it up and show me what was in it. Uncle Nick didn't want the money. He just wanted the bag. He's always wanted one like that—made of nice shiny leather."

"Good night!" Slattery groaned faintly.

"I knew he stole it," the boy explained uncomfortably. "But—but he cried when I took it away from him. He wanted it so bad. I—I was going to pay you for it, mister. I would have taken your other things out only I didn't have any way to carry them."

"Well," said Slattery, "Well, well!"

There was a plaintive whine from behind them. Slattery jerked around, startled.

"It's Muggsy — my dog," the boy said. "The explosion scared him pretty bad. Here, boy."

THE little fox terrier crept along the sand toward them, cringing low, whining a little. He recognized Slattery suddenly and came forward in a spattering shower of sand and hopped up and down against the boy's leg, making glad yapping sounds.

"Well," said Slattery numbly. "I guess—I'll go to the house and try to find a drink."

"I took a bottle out of your bag," the boy said. "I hid it with the money. It had a funny label on it, and I didn't think it would be good for Uncle Nick to drink it."

Slattery drew a deep, incredulous breath. "My friend," he said, "you are — you are — something!" He reached for the lad's hand, shook it gravely. "Lead on!"

They went down the beach together —a long shadow and a short shadow, with the fox terrier a humped little blur tagging at their heels.

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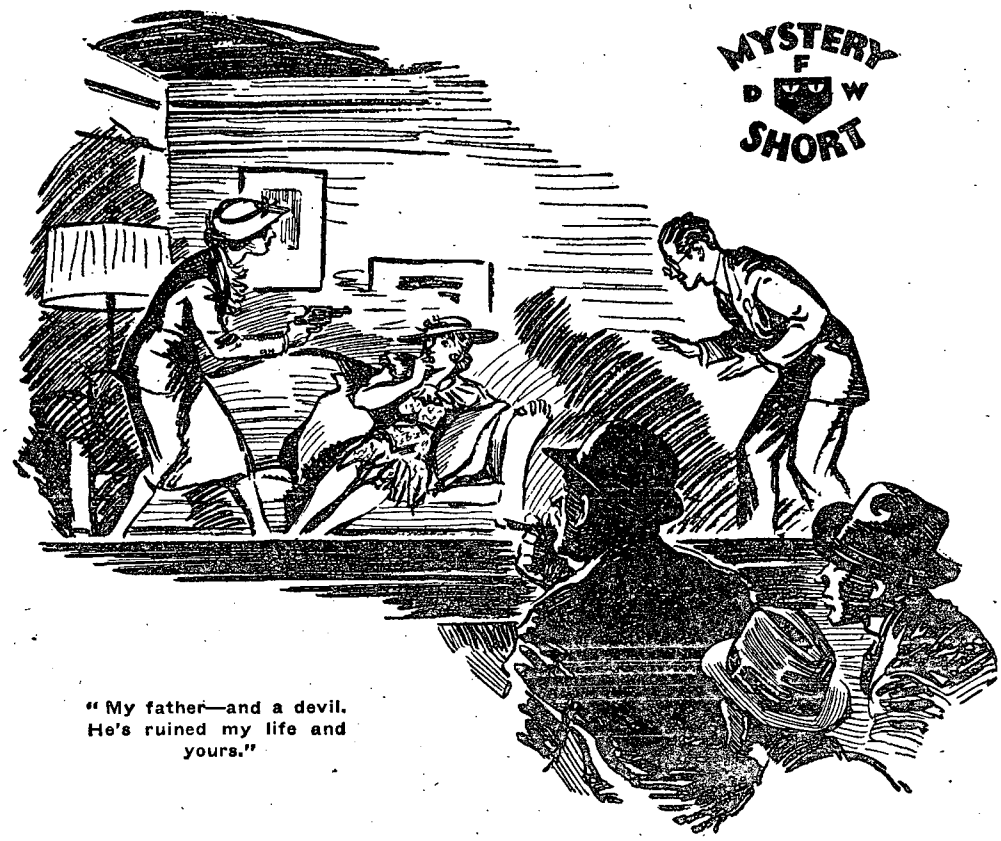

"My father—and a devil. He's ruined my life and yours."

Murder at Rehearsal

By

Whitman Chambers

Katie Blayne, the Duchess, Set Too Fast a Pace to Please the City Hall News-Hounds —but After That Murder Frame, They Would Go the Limit for Her Any Time

A FUNNY thing—the three of us were sitting in the City Hall press room discussing them at the exact moment, as we learned later, the murder was committed.

We were talking about Abner Holt, wealthy amateur actor and patron of the arts. We were talking about Harriet Holt, Abner's youthful wife, who was the leading lady of the Community Players. We were talking, too, about young Sam O'Malley, director of the Community Theater. O'Malley had been imported by Abner Holt, at ten grand a year, to make us yokels Drahma-conscious.

And we were talk-

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ing, as usual, about Katie Blayne, known to a dubious fame as the Duchess. Katie covers police for the *Sun.*

We were talking about these four, collectively so to speak, because Katie had the second lead in the Players' forthcoming production and was spending this afternoon, her day off, at rehearsal.

Sour-faced Jeff Gervin, of the *Sentinel,* shuffled the cards viciously. "Look here, you lugs. I say there's something phony about the Duchess giving this acting racket a tumble. I'll lay even money she's got a crush on Handsome Sam—O'Malley to you."

Spike Kaylor snapped: "Deal, will yuh?"

Jeff dealt, picked up his hand, sorted it, and cocked a mean eye at me. "Katie," he said, "always was a sucker for the collar-ad type. Too bad, Pinky, you got such big ears and that busted nose."

"Would you just as soon lay off the Duchess for a while?" Spike demanded. He's a little guy and when he gets peevish his short-cropped bushy red hair seems to stand up all over his head. "I'm sick of hearing about the dame. Bid!"

The game finally got under way. And fifteen minutes later, in the middle of a hot hand, the desk sergeant poked his head in the press room doorway.

"Look, fellows! I guess you'll want this. I just got a flash from the inspectors' bureau. Katie Blayne has killed Abner Holt. Shot him in the heart at the Community Theater. Captain Wallis has just gone out. I thought you'd like to know."

And he ducked through the door. . . .

No one of us said anything. I found myself staring blankly at Jeff Gervin, without seeing him. And then his hard face with the thin lips, the little black eyes, the bushy eyebrows one higher than the other, swam into focus.

He was looking at me with one cocked eye. He was leering at me! His lips twisted downward. He said: "So that's the dame you got a crush on. A killer, huh? Nice girl!"

I realized all at once that my right fist was moving. I put my shoulder behind it and landed flush on his sneering mouth. Jeff toppled backwards in his chair and struck the floor with a crash.

Faster than I'd ever moved before in my life I got out of there.

I found Captain Wallis' big black sedan drawn up in front of the Community Theater. Pulling in behind it, I cut my motor, leaped out, dashed up the stairs and into the theater.

The house was dark but the stage was bright with light and crowded with people. I started down the aisle on a dead run. Then I slowed to a walk and at last I was barely moving.

For abruptly it seemed to me that the darkened house was full of tense and silent people who were watching the steady unfolding of a vital drama. Like a late arrival, mindful of the rights of the rest of the audience, I crept to a seat in the front row and eased silently into it.

Get the setting, the characters:

A drawing room. A chesterfield set diagonally center. A table beside it. An occasional chair to right, another to left, two at the rear. Several bridge lamps. Fireplace right. Door downstage from it. Another door, open, at left.

Downstage right, the body of Abner Holt. Beside it, kneeling, Captain Wallis. On the other side of the body, standing, looking dumb and important, Inspector Jenkins.

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On the chesterfield, Harriet Holt, sobbing but not hysterical. On either side of her a young man and a young woman I'd never seen before. Behind the chesterfield, slouching, a gangly man in overalls.

At the rear, pacing nervously back and forth, handsome, dark-eyed Sam O'Malley. To the left upstage, a group of three young people I didn't know.

And motionless beside the davenport table, white but not excited, watching Captain Wallis with steady eyes, Katie Blayne, blond and slim and lovely.

THERE was no sound, for the moment, except the quiet sobbing of the dead man's wife. Captain Wallis rose slowly to his feet; he was old and you could almost hear his bones creak. He turned to the Duchess, gave her a long stare from those ice-blue eyes of his and tossed her the cue:

"Start from the beginning, Katie. And make it snappy."

Katie took a step forward toward the footlights. She was beautiful and tragic; she had poise. Her acting was—

But this wasn't acting! This was living. Abner Holt wasn't lying motionless, trying not to show he breathed. Abner Holt was dead! The red stuff on the stage beside his still body was blood!

Katie, steadily: "It was our final rehearsal before our performance tonight. I won't bother you with the details of the play. Suffice to say that Mrs. Holt and I were alone on the stage. The others were not off-stage, but merely in the background, out of the way. The action called for Mr. Holt to come out of that door right. I am across the stage. There are two or three brief lines. Then I take a gun out of my handbag and shoot him. Well—"

Katie faltered; she got hold of herself, continued evenly. "He came out, we read our lines, I fired at him and —he fell. He screamed once and—and died!"

Captain Wallis, with heavy sarcasm: "I see. And the revolver, of course, was supposed to have been loaded with a blank cartridge."

Katie, defiantly: "The revolver *was* loaded with a blank cartridge. I loaded it myself just before we started to run through the scene. And please don't suggest, Captain, that I don't know a blank cartridge from the other kind."

Captain Wallis, sneering: "Yeah. Sure, sure. But there's Abner Holt. Dead. How would you account for it?"

Katie, helplessly: "I don't, Captain."

Inspector Jenkins, edging downstage: "It's a cinch, skipper. After the Duchess loaded the rod with the blank shell, somebody slipped out the phony and put in the real MCoy."

Katie, smiling faintly: "It's a good theory, Inspector. But I loaded the revolver only a minute or two before I fired the shot. And from the time I loaded it and put it in my handbag until the time I took it out and fired, the gun wasn't out of my possession for an instant."

I heard the patter of footsteps. Turning, I saw Spike Kaylor and Jeff Gervin bearing down out of the gloom of the darkened house. I hissed at them:

"S-s-s-s! Sit down, you mugs. Sit down and keep quiet."

They eased into seats across the aisle, silently almost apologetically. I don't think any of the people on the stage had

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heard my admonition, or even knew they had an audience.

The play went on as Captain Wallis said coldly:

"If you say, Miss Blayne, that the gun was never out of your possession from the time you loaded it with the blank until you fired it, there is only one other explanation of this killing." He paused an instant, trying to stare her down with those cold blue eyes of his. I could have killed him! "Someone off stage shot Holt at the exact instant you fired the blank."

O'Malley, speaking for the first time: "Such timing, Captain, would be impossible. I am a director. I understand timing. I know that for those two shots to have coincided they must have been fired within a tenth of a second of each other. Perhaps less. No one, standing off stage, could time a shot to coincide so closely with the instant Miss Blayne pulled the trigger. It is impossible."

Captain Wallis, coldly: "Then there is only one alternative."

I held my breath, and everybody else in the theater seemed to do the same thing, as Wallis went on:

"You, Miss Blayne, gave a signal to the party off stage. A certain movement of the gun, say. Or a slight movement of your left hand, or your head. You—and the party off stage—had rehearsed this signal until your timing was perfect. And the two explosions were so nearly simultaneous that the other people on the stage thought they heard only one shot."

There was a taut and breathless silence. I saw Katie's lips go white and her blue eyes, for an instant, were frightened. Then her head lifted a little and her jaw hardened with determination.

Katie, steadily and coldly: "You are accusing me, then, of complicity in a cold-blooded murder?"

O'Malley, angrily: "You're being absurd, Captain!"

Inspector Jenkins: "Shut up, you! The Captain's conductin' this investigation."

O'Malley: "But, you addle-pated idiots—"

Katie: "Please, Mr. O'Malley! You won't do me any good by calling them names."

II

HARRIET HOLT, speaking for the first time: "I think you're all crazy. Miss Blayne and my husband were the best of friends. Why, what possible motive—"

Inspector Jenkins, threateningly: "Skip it!"

Captain Wallis, decisively: "It is too soon, Mrs. Holt, to delve into motives. All we want now is to construct a reasonable theory to explain the commission of this murder." Wallis nodded toward the revolver which lay on the table: "Who, by the way, belongs to the gun?"

O'Malley: "It belongs to me. I like guns and I have several good ones."

Inspector Jenkins: "You got permits for these several good guns you got?"

O'Malley: "I have permits to own and to carry every one of them."

Captain Wallis, glaring first at the body and then at Katie: "Well, that's the way it stands. Either Miss Blayne signaled someone off-stage to fire at the instant she pulled the trigger, or the cartridge she herself put in the gun was not a blank."

O'Malley, fiercely: "And either way you're accusing the girl of murder!"

Captain Wallis, bellowing angrily: "I'm accusing no one of anything—

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yet! So just keep your mouth shut." More quietly: "One point will be settled within a day, however. Miss Blayne may or may not have lied about the cartridge she put in the gun. But the marks made by the lands of the rifling will not lie. As soon as the lethal bullet is recovered, I'll put our ballistics expert to work. By tomorrow, at the latest, we'll know whether or not the shot came from that revolver on the table. That will be all."

I heard Jeff Gervin mutter: "Curtain!"

The first act was over.

Five minutes later I was driving down the street with Katie Blayne beside me. She didn't look much like a fine actress now. She looked like a scared little girl who wanted to cry. I put my arm around her and pulled her over against me.

"Try to forget about it, kid. You haven't killed anybody and we all know it."

She didn't say anything; she merely sighed. And it struck me all at once that the Duchess didn't know, didn't truly *know*, whether she had killed Abner Holt or not. What a spot for a nice kid like Katie!

"Look, Duchess! Are you absolutely certain you put a blank in that gun?"

She drew away from me. "Pinky! Don't be a fool! Is that the sort of thing a person would make a mistake about?"

"All right, we'll pass that. And you are sure, too, that the gun wasn't out of your possession from the time you loaded it until you fired it."

"You heard me tell Captain Wallis, didn't you, that I was absolutely certain?"

"Telling Captain Wallis is one thing. Telling me is another. And being absolutely certain is still a third. Now, what'll you have? I'll take vanilla."

"This is no time, Pinky, for smart cracks. I tell you the gun was never out of my possession for an instant."

"Then somebody in the wings contrived to fire at the same instant you did."

"And the timing?"

"Who knows? Blind luck, maybe."

"No," Katie said. "People who set out to commit cold-blooded murders don't trust to blind luck."

"All right. Who had a motive to kill Abner Holt? His wife?"

"So far as I know, Harriet loved him. She's quite a bit younger than he, but she's always been comradely and loyal."

"All right, who else? Sam O'Malley?"

"Mr. Holt brought Sam O'Malley out here from Detroit at a high salary. As long as Holt lived, Sam O'Malley would have a good position. Now that he's dead, O'Malley will probably have to look for a job. Is it likely that Sam would kill that kind of a patron?"

"It doesn't seem so. Who else? Who was the guy in overalls?"

"Grogan, I think his name is. He's just a stage electrician on hand for the dress rehearsal. I see no reason why he'd kill Mr. Holt."

"No, none of us see any reason why anybody would kill Mr. Holt," I said bitterly. "But somebody did. It wasn't an accident. You're too positive about that revolver and you know too much about firearms. So what?"

"So, darling, suppose you drop me at the *Sun* office." She tried to speak lightly, but she didn't have much spirit. "After all, you know, my dream, the dream of every good reporter, has come true. I was on the scene when a big story broke." She choked on the words.

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"And I've got—to write—an eye-witness story."

I DROPPED her at the *Sun* building and then phoned my office. When I got back to the press room in the City Hall, Jeff Gervin and Spike were there, along with half a dozen other reporters and a couple of photographers.

"You're a pal," Jeff beefed, "stealing the star suspect before we could get a camera man on the job. Do you realize there isn't a paper in town, outside of the *Sun*, that has Katie's picture in its morgue?"

"And there isn't a paper in town, outside of your lousy sheet, that would use Katie's picture," Spike spoke up, bristling.

Jeff shrugged, turned to his desk and dragged out a bottle. He took a husky snort and cocked one eye at me.

"I'll see you in court, big boy," he leered, heading toward the door, "when the Duchess goes on trial for murder."

Well, that was a laugh—but not a very big one.

The next day Katie was on the job as usual. She looked dragged out, as though she hadn't slept much, and she started nervously whenever a door banged or a phone rang. No one mentioned the case, but we were all of us pretty jittery.

We kept wondering what would be the conclusion of Captain Wallis' ballistic expert. If Katie had actually fired the shot that killed Abner Holt—

Well, that was something I didn't like to think about. Frankly, I was scared.

It was a little after eleven when I answered one of the phones and recognized Captain Wallis' cold voice. "Is Miss Blayne there?"

"Yes."

"All right, keep her there. I'll be down."

I hung up and looked at Katie. Her eyes, meeting mine, were haggard, frightened. Her mouth trembled. Damn it, I felt as though someone were twisting a knife in my heart!

"It was Bodie Wallis," I said. "Now look here, Duchess. Keep a stiff upper lip. No matter what happens, we're for you. We may have been pretty nasty to you sometimes, and resented you, and all that. But when the pinch comes, we're backing you up. Right, gang?"

"Right," Spike Kaylor loyally agreed.

"Absolutely," nodded lanky, hatchet-faced Pete Zerker of the *Bulletin*.

"O. K.," said fat Willie Blake of the *Sentinel*.

"Oh, nuts," Jeff Gervin snorted.

The Duchess gripped the arms of her chair, said quietly to the room at large:

"Listen. This is going against me. I have a feeling. Captain Wallis is going to tell me the bullet came from my gun. Now listen. I thought of something, lying awake last night. I thought of two things. First, the recoil of that shot was very slight. Now you know there is almost no kick from a blank cartridge. It's a matter of weight. To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

"Hurry up, kid," I urged.

"Well, with no bullet, only a paper wadding, there is very little recoil. That's the first thing that proves the bullet didn't come out of that gun. Here's the second. I'm almost certain I wasn't aiming at Mr. Holt when I pulled the trigger. He was more than halfway across the stage from me. But even so, I thought of the paper wadding. I thought of Mr. Holt's eyes.

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And I know I aimed to the right of him."

"That," Willie Blake said, "should cinch the matter."

"In my own mind, yes. But those are hard things to prove. Now look. Shall I tell Captain Wallis all this if he says I fired the bullet?"

"Kid, if he says that, you're going to need an attorney," I said.

"Tell Wallis nothing," Spike growled.

"Tell your attorney," Pete ordered.

Jeff Gervin poured himself a drink and didn't make any comments. I strolled over to him.

"Look, Jeff."

"At what?"

"You're not sounding off. Not any. You're not spilling what Katie has told us either to your lousy paper or to Brodie Wallis. Got it?"

He looked at me with narrowed eyes, sneering. "Yeah."

"Then keep it."

"And if you don't," Spike Kaylor vowed, "there'll be another murder mystery around here."

Captain Wallis came in carrying a sheaf of photographs, still wet He nodded to us, scowling, and laid out the pictures on Willie's desk.

"You boys all know the procedure," he said. "Twelve photographs of the lethal bullet, spaced thirty degrees apart, and joined together to make a long strip. A similar composite photograph of a slug from the suspected weapon. Place one strip above the other, move it back and forth, try to match up the grooves made by the lands of the rifling. Now the rifling of no two guns is identical. Just as—"

"Sure," Spike Kaylor interrupted impatiently, "just as no two fingerprints are identical Greatly enlarged, gentlemen of the jury, as are these photographs I now hold in my hand— Aw, nuts! We know all that stuff, Bodie. What's the verdict? Did the bullet that killed Abner Holt come out of the gun Katie fired?"

We held our breaths as Captain Wallis jerked his head toward the array of pictures.

"It did," he said coldly. "You may look for yourselves."

I reached for Katie too late. Out cold, she slid down in a little heap on the littered floor of the press room.

Willie came over, as I put her head down and Pete ran for water. "Jeez, the poor kid," Willie said. "Even if she didn't mean to kill him, even if somebody jobbed her, it's a hell of a thing to have on her conscience. Jeez!"

III

WHEN we had finally brought Katie around and got her into a chair and a little color had come back in her face, Captain Wallis strolled over. He stood looking at her with those sharp cold blue eyes that had made many a crook's heart quail.

"Got anything more to say, Katie?"

"Nothing. Only what I told you yesterday."

"That's your story and you're sticking to it, huh? How about these pictures?"

Katie shrugged helplessly and bit her lip. I knew that if she said anything she'd burst into tears.

Wallis stood glaring at her. I could have swung on him! He said finally: "I'm not making any pinch right now, Katie. However, if the conclusion pointed by those pictures, along with what we've said here, gets into any of the papers—into the can you go."

He looked at us and we looked at Jeff Gervin.

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Jeff poured himself a drink and hissed:

"Sissies!"

"Now, here's my plan," Wallis went on. "I want to spend the rest of the day checking up on the people who were in the theater when Holt was shot. Grogan, the electrician, for instance. The others members of the cast. Then tonight we'll have a rehearsal in the Community Theater. You newspapermen and myself will make up the audience. The cast will be as you saw it yesterday.

"Miss Blayne and the other players will take their places on the stage, just where they were when that last scene was begun. You'll start, Katie, from the point you make your entrance for that scene. You'll carry through to the point where you fired at Holt. And we'll see what happens. We'll see who lied about where he was at that moment. We'll check every member of the cast against every other member. Somebody lied, and when we find a liar in a situation like this—well, we find a murderer. That's all."

The captain went out. And after a little while Jeff Gervin started to follow him. Spike Kaylor stopped him at the door.

"Where you bound, mugg?"

"That," said Jeff, "is my business. If I'm wrong, correct me."

"Then consider yourself corrected. Where you bound?"

Jeff was half drunk and he had, certainly, provocation. He swung a long looping right that clipped Spike behind the ear and sent him spinning. The rest of us were sitting down. Before we could get to our feet and bar the door, Jeff Gervin was out and gone.

"Now isn't that a pretty kettle of fish?" Willie Blake groaned.

Spike picked himself up, nodded to me and we went out into the corridor.

"Look here, Pink," Spike began. "That little gal is in a tough spot. We gotta help her."

Coming from Spike Kaylor, this was something. Spike has never liked the Duchess.

"Why should you worry?" I asked. "After the way you've treated the kid since she's been in the press room."

"Have I been lousy?" Spike grinned. "Well, that was all in the spirit of real clean fun. Well, fairly clean, anyway. This is different. Jeff Gervin, if I know that rat, has gone to work to hang this job on the Duchess. And while Jeff may be a drunk and all that, he's a damned sharp newspaperman and a top-notch investigator. If anybody can hang it on her, Jeff can do it."

"Not to mention that damned Captain Wallis. He'd hang a murder on his own mother to make page one."

"You said it."

"All right. What's to do?" I asked.

"I want you to cover the beat for me today. I gotta hunch."

"Shoot!"

"Shoot hell! There's been too much shooting on this job already. Do you cover for me today?"

"I cover for you today."

When I went back into the press room Katie was sitting in a chair, just sitting there staring at the opposite wall and looking white and frightened, sick. It must be a jolt to be told all of a sudden that you have, all unwittingly, killed a decent and honorable man.

I wanted to say something to cheer her, but, so help me, I couldn't think of a thing. I was sunk.

Spike Kaylor, a cub reporter, had a hunch. That was one side of the case. And on the other side—Jeff Gervin, mean, vindictive, but a brilliant mind and a crack reporter, also had a hunch.

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And Captain Wallis, nobody's fool, was out to make a record for himself.

That was the situation. Was it any wonder I couldn't think of anything cheering to say?

AT eight o'clock that evening I sat with Willie Blake, Jeff Gervin, Peter Zerker and three or four other newspapermen, in the front row of the Community Theater.

"Where's Spike?" Willie asked.

"Haven't seen him since morning," I said. "He had a hunch and went to work on it."

Jeff Gervin guffawed. "That cub? Listen. I saw Spike Kaylor in Mike's jernt half an hour ago. And was he cock-eyed! Been drinking all day, if you ask me."

That hit me hard. Well, if Jeff Gervin told the truth, I'd knock Spike Kaylor's head off the next time I saw him.

"And lemme tell you something else, you chicken-hearted lugs," Jeff Gervin went on. "When this case is cracked, I'll crack it. Me and Bodie Wallis. And when we crack it, muh franz, the Duchess goes to jail!"

"And when'll that be, mugg?" I asked.

"Pretty damned quick!"

He said it with such evident glee, such smug confidence, that all at once I felt a sinking in the pit of my stomach. My hands were wet with perspiration, and yet I shivered.

Was Jeff Gervin bluffing? Taking us for a ride? Or was he in the know?

I looked up at Katie on the stage. I wanted to yell: "Don't go through with this farce! They're going to trick you! Don't say a word! Don't do a thing! Stop! Stop before it's too late!"

That's what I wanted to yell at Katie —and I did not have the nerve.

The house lights went off; the footlights went on. The show began.

Captain Wallis, from the orchestra pit: "You've all been told what you're supposed to do. O'Malley, you'll have to slip out of your own part and play Mr. Holt's. You probably know the lines better than anybody else. Do that at the point Mr. Holt comes on stage. All right. Go ahead."

The younger players and the overalled electrician walked to the rear of the stage. O'Malley moved up to the footlights, well to the right, and stood watching the action. Katie moved left to the door, leaving Harriet Holt alone on the chesterfield.

Katie: "Hello, Jane."

Harriet, rising in surprise: "Why, darling! Where in the world did you drop from?"

Katie, dully clutching her bag: "I didn't drop. I came up. From hell."

Harriet: "Oh, but darling! You shouldn't talk that way. Come over here and sit down. There must be a way out of this."

Katie: "There is a way. One way."

Harriet: "What do you mean?"

O'Malley, aside to Captain Wallis: "I'm going into Holt's part now." He slipped into the ring wing and came out the door onto the living room set. He was fumbling with a pair of glasses. "Ah. Ah. There you are, my dear. Damme, Jane, if I haven't broken my glasses again."

Harriet: "Dad! Here is Helen. Can't you speak to her?"

As O'Malley peered, blinking, across the stage at Katie I felt my heart pounding. The lid was about to blow off. I could feel it in every nerve of my body.

O'Malley, still peering across the stage: Surely not—not *Helen!*"

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Katie, bitterly: "Yes. Your darling Helen."

O'Malley took two faltering steps toward her. And Katie, on the other side of the stage, calmly opened her handbag. She took out the revolver without a word.

Harriet, screaming: "Helen! Helen! Don't. He's your own father!"

Katie: "Yes, and a devil. He's ruined my life and yours."

She raised the gun and fired at O'Malley.

And that, it seemed, was that. I felt let down, disappointed, like you feel when you go to a show expecting a hit and see a flop. There was no sense to it, no climax, no more drama than you'd find in an aquarium.

Captain Wallis said calmly: "Very well done, everybody. Now, Miss Blayne, if you will—"

IV

AND suddenly we saw, we all saw, that Sam O'Malley was sinking to his knees, his hands clutching his right side, his face contorted.

I found myself on my feet. We were all on our feet.

Captain Wallis leaped onto a chair and started to climb over the footlights, muttering: "Good Lord! Good Lord!"

Katie Blayne's jaw had dropped and she stood staring blankly first at O'Malley and then at the revolver in her hand.

Harriet Holt, widow of a day, screamed and started for O'Malley. "Oh, my darling! My darling! What happened?"

O'Malley was on his knees. His face was dead white, his eyes terror-stricken.

Harriet Holt, this young and lovely widow, dropped to her knees beside him, pleading: "Tell me, darling! Are you badly hurt?"

Captain Wallis gained the stage; he was still muttering: "Good Lord! Good Lord!"

O'Malley raised his tragic Irish eyes. I guess he thought he was dying and he had to die prettily. "Harriet, dear! I'm shot!"

And then above the confused babble came a sneering, jeering voice from the wings:

"So it stung a little, did it? Hurt you, huh? Well, how do you think it felt to Abner Holt?"

And in the sudden dead and awesome silence, Spike Kaylor swaggered onto the stage. He carried a Lüger automatic fitted with a detachable butt and a Maxim silencer. His hat was on cock-eyed. A smoldering cigarette drooped from his lips. He looked pretty drunk, but he walked with an air.

Captain Wallis bellowed abruptly: "Kaylor! Have you shot this man?"

"Sure, Skipper, sure! But there wasn't enough powder behind that pellet to knock over a humming bird. Prob'ly didn't even break the skin. It just scared the pants off him and precipitated a little love duet with the Merry Widow. *Harriet, dear! I'm shot!*...Jeez, what a yellow louse!"

"But, good night, man!" Captain Wallis roared. "Why did you shoot him?"

"Well, you were putting on a show, weren't you?" Spike countered. "And it was flopping, wasn't it? You needed a little drama and you couldn't cut it. Well, I gave it to you. I dragged the show out of the fire with a smashing climax." He took the cigarette out of his mouth and airily flicked off the ash. "Besides," he added nonchalantly, "I supplied a motive for the murder of Abner Holt that even you half-witted coppers could understand."

O'Malley, by this time, was on his feet. "The man's insane!" he cried.

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"Oh, yeah?" Spike retorted. "Well, I'm just a little smarter than you are. And if I'm insane, what'n'hell does that make you? A Mongolian idiot? No! Just a handsome Irishman with a yen to marry a rich widow. Skipper, drag him off to the can and charge him with the murder of Abner Holt. And if I can't give you enough evidence to send him waltzing at the end of a rope, I'll confess I don't know as much about this case as Jeff Gervin. And he probably doesn't even know who was murdered. Anybody got a drink?"

Willie had a flask which he promptly passed across the footlights. Spike took a long drag, said: "Lousy!"

"I think you'd better explain yourself, Kaylor," Captain Wallis said. "I can hardly arrest a man on a murder charge without more evidence than you've given me."

Spike tossed him the Lüger. "You want evidence? There's your evidence. Break it down and hold the barrel up to the light. What'll you see? I'll tell you. You'll see a smooth bore, no rifling. Mean anything to you? Not a thing! That's because you're only a dumb copper. A nice guy, I'll grant you, but only a dumb copper."

"Quit bragging and get on with your rat-killing," the captain snapped.

"Well, this morning I called on Mr. O'Malley and had a little talk with him. I told him it was just a routine assignment. And while I was there I buzzed him about his collection of guns. I like guns myself. He showed me what he had and I happened to hold the barrel of this Lüger up to the light. It didn't have the silencer on it then. I got that this afternoon from a gunsmith friend of mine. Anyway, the barrel was as smooth as glass. It had no rifling and, funny thing, the caliber looked just a shade too large.

"Well, I didn't say anything, but after I left O'Malley's joint I did a lot of thinking. And I tumbled." Spike took another healthy swig from the flask. "The lay was this. O'Malley had drilled out the barrel of this Lüger and made a smooth bore of it, a bore just large enough to handle a .32 caliber slug.

"He fired a shot from that revolver Katie used into a bag of cotton. He recovered the slug, which then had the distinctive rifling marks of the revolver, and fitted it into a special shell that the Lüger would handle."

Spike lit another cigarette, airily. "No trick to that. My gunsmith friend and I made one this afternoon. Only where O'Malley put enough powder in the cartridge to kill a man, we put in just enough to sting him.... Did it hurt very much, *dearie?*"

O'Malley, ashen-faced and trembling, glared at the cocky Spike and kept his lips clamped shut.

KAYLOR shrugged. "Anyway, O'Malley fitted the Lüger with a silencer which he's since ditched. It may turn up and it may not; it doesn't matter anyway. At the crucial moment in the rehearsal, where Abner Holt enters, O'Malley slipped into the wings. When Katie fired, O'Malley let Holt have it in the heart. And with a neat little gat like this, even bored smooth, a good marksman couldn't miss. In the confusion he cached the Lüger and got back on the stage. And that was that.... Well, how does it sound, skipper?"

Captain Wallis looked at O'Malley, and at Harriet Holt, and then again at Spike. "It's all so logical I'm ashamed of myself," he admitted. "But how, Kaylor, did you get the Lüger?"

Spike grinned. "I cased O'Malley's

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joint till I saw him breeze out to lunch. Then I broke into his apartment and stole the rod."

"You fool!" Harriet Holt screamed suddenly, whirling on Sam O'Malley. "I told you to get rid of that gun."

"Shut up!" O'Malley hissed through clenched teeth.

"But no!" she cried furiously. "You idotic gun-lover! You had to keep it! You'd get a new barrel! You *loved* that Lüger! And, oh, no! The police would never search your apartment. And even if they did, they'd never examine all your guns. And they wouldn't spot that bored-out barrel if they did. Of all the bigoted, conceited—"

"Shut up, you crazy fool!" O'Malley raged. "Do you want to put your head in the noose?"

Noose! That stopped her. Until she heard that word I don't think she had the slightest inkling of what she was doing. Now her face, red with rage, abruptly went white.

"Jeez, what a dumb Dora!" Willie Blake whispered. "If she hadn't busted out like that, he might have beat the rap."

Captain Wallis stood watching the hysterical widow for a moment or two. Then a faint smile appeared on his lips; he quickly brushed it away with the back of his hand and turned back to Spike.

"You say, Kaylor, that you burglarized this man's apartment?"

"You got me the first time, skipper. I committed first degree burglary. I confess and there's the evidence. And what are you going to do about it?"

"As much as it pains me to admit it, Spike, I'm not going to do a damned thing about it."

Spike gave him a mock salute. Then he turned and looked at us across the footlights.

"How was *it*, gang?" he asked, beaming.

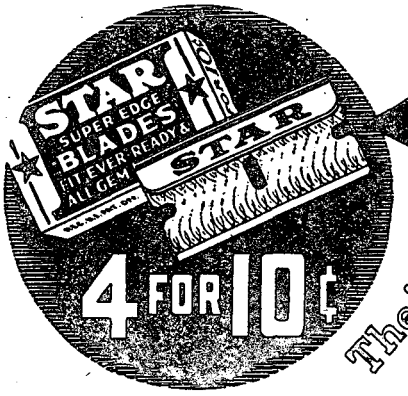
"Well," I said, "nobody has ever called me queer, but I could kiss you, you sawed-off little red-headed bum."

"I'll kiss him for you," Katie said promptly, if a bit hysterically.

"Aw, nuts!" Jeff Gervin snorted. "Let's scram out of here. I got an edition in ten minutes."

"I got an edition, too," I said, hopping up.

We all of us started up the darkened aisle on a dead run. And in some way—I never did find out exactly how—Jeff Gervin got knocked down. He got knocked down, and *out!* They say he didn't come to for half an hour, and missed his edition, and almost got fired. All of which broke nobody's heart.



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Almost Perfect

"Why, that is also my name. What a coincidence!"

By Convict 12627

WHEN James Howard McLean—that's the name he was using at the time—enlisted in the Canadian Army back in 1917, he was not actuated by any patriotic motives. No, McLean was not the type ever to be inspired by patriotism. From the time he first began selling newspapers on the streets at the age of nine and made more money from crooked dice than he did from his newspapers, he had preyed on other people for a living. And when he walked into a recruiting office of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in Chicago he was just a few steps ahead of the law.

Why Was Major McLean, International Crook, Shielded from the Police by the Jeweler Whom He had Robbed?

For the first few days at the training camp in Canada, after drilling long hours under a burning sun and becoming nauseated from the effects of serum shots, McLean doubtless wished he had let the law take its course and taken his rap in the Big House where he had always been able to soft talk his way into a job carrying with it good food and special privileges. But it's hard to keep a good confidence man down, and before the call came to prepare for the

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trip overseas, McLean was a corporal.

During the long trip across the ocean on a boat formerly used for the transportation of cattle, McLean made his leisure moments pay. He could do things with cards and dice, and when the boat berthed at Tilbury Docks at London, he had more than his share of the money on board. His ego was disturbed when a bristle-mustached British sergeant deftly removed the corporal stripes from his arms and bluntly informed him that he could have no stripes in England until he had earned them.

It was a sad blow to McLean when he found his soft talk and ingratiating smile getting nowhere with the stern British officers who were intent upon winning a war and had little time for sluggards.

In less than thirty days after the cattle boat had docked at London, McLean was listed as a deserter from a segregation camp.

Having neglected to familiarize himself with the customs of the country and the military regulations then in force, McLean found the forty mile trip from the segregation camp to London a difficult one. He attempted several times to board a train, but found he could not do so without showing a pass which he did not have. Finally, after distributing a few ten-shilling notes along the way he reached London. It did not take him long to make the proper connections which enabled him to obtain a forged passport. Armed with this, a new outfit of civilian clothing, and a quantity of checks drawn on American and Canadian banks, he was ready to test the gullibility of British citizens.

McLean soon learned that checks were more readily accepted from Army officers than from civilians, so he obtained uniforms representing almost every nation engaged in the war but Germany and, posing as an Army officer, he experienced but little difficulty in exchanging worthless pieces of paper for British pounds. When he was not "working," he dressed in civilian clothing and his forged passport which stated that he was an American journalist was never questioned by inquiring officials.

When the Armistice was signed McLean was still a deserter and although he had made much money, he had spent it about as fast as he had taken it in. He began to yearn for the United States but felt that his phony passport would not get by the immigration officials, nor did he relish the idea of giving himself up to the military authorities, knowing he would be court-martialed and doubtless receive a stiff sentence to a military disciplinary barracks.

It was early in 1919 that fate placed in McLean's hands an opportunity which he felt sure would net him enough money to bribe his way back to the United States without a passport and land with considerable cash left over.

ONE morning he had finished his breakfast and, in accordance with his daily custom, had walked to Waterloo Bridge where he sat and read the morning paper while he enjoyed an after breakfast cigar. He had placed the paper on the stone seat and was lighting a cigar when he realized that someone was speaking to him.

"That was quite a touch, wasn't it, guv'nor?"

McLean turned and saw sitting beside him a young man clothed in the worn and tattered uniform of a British

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private. He noted that the man's right arm and left leg were severed, and a battered crutch leaned up against the railing. The young man was pointing with a grimy finger to an article on the front sheet of the paper which told of a hold-up that had taken place in Liverpool the previous day in which the bandits had secured a quantity of jewelry.

McLean was a lone wolf and always made a practice when talking to other people to pose as an honest man, and he lost no time in denouncing these jewelry bandits.

"It is quite true," he said, after reading the article, "that these men succeeded in getting away with a large amount of jewelry, but you can safely wager that they will be caught, and in a very short time. Dishonesty never pays."

"I used to think that, too, guv'nor," the soldier said, "but I'm beginning to change my mind."

"That's a very bad state of mind to get in," remarked McLean. "I can see that you probably haven't been getting the best breaks in the world, but you shouldn't let that discourage you."

"I fought through the whole war, guv'nor," the soldier continued bitterly. "I left an arm and a leg over there and now all I get is fifteen shillings a week to keep myself, my wife and two kiddies. I ask you, is that right?"

"I am an American," answered McLean, "and it is not my place to criticize your government. I daresay you are being treated as fairly as other men similarly situated. I don't believe your government intends to discriminate against anyone."

"I'm going to tell you a story, guv'nor," the soldier said. "Probably you won't be interested, but I just want to know if, after hearing it, you won't agree with me that honesty doesn't pay. Got time to listen to it?"

"If it isn't too long," replied McLean. "Go ahead."

"Before the war started," the soldier began, "I was a taxi driver stationed at Charing Cross. On a number of occasions I was called by a jeweler who has a store in the Strand. Each time he gave me a letter to deliver to his home and in return I would receive a package which I would take to him at the store. One time the envelope was not sealed good and I read the letter. It was an order to the man's wife to give me five hundred pounds. When I got the package I peeked in and, sure enough, it was money.

"Well, I found that I had been carrying large sums of money for this man all the time and he seldom even gave me a tip.

"I mentioned the matter to an older taxi driver and he told me that this jeweler was a fence, a man who buys hot jewelry, you know. Because he was in this racket he didn't have a telephone in his store or at home, and he didn't have any bank account but kept his money at home and sent to his wife for it when he needed any.

"Well, to make a long story short, I went around to see this man the other day. I showed him what I was up against and told him that if I had three or four pounds to buy an artificial arm I could get a job and make a living for my family. I asked him to lend me the money and promised to pay him back when I got to work. He almost threw me out of the store. Now, I ask you, does that show that honesty pays? I could have stolen a small fortune from that man and he wouldn't have

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been in a position to make a complaint to the police."

II

McLEAN considered a bit before answering. His mind, however, was not occupied with the moral status of the situation; he was beginning to see possibilities of taking some of the crooked jeweler's cash.

"My friend," he said finally, "I am deeply touched by your story, but it grieves me to think that you are at the point where you might turn to crime and bring suffering upon your family. I am a journalist, a writer, and I may be able to make a story out of what you have told me. In the meantime, I want you to accept this ten-shilling note. Buy some food for your family and meet me here at the same time tomorrow. If I find that I can use your story I may be able to give you enough money to buy an artificial arm so that you can support your family. In the meantime, I wish you wouldn't express your opinions on crime to anybody as it may get you into trouble."

McLean devoted the remainder of the day to investigating the truth of the soldier's story insofar as the jeweler was concerned, and by the following morning he had formulated a plan which he believed was perfect and would net close to five thousand dollars at the current rate of exchange. In accordance with his promise he met the soldier at the appointed place, gave him five pounds and again cautioned him against discussing the jeweler's activities promiscuously.

It was almost a week later when McLean put his plans in operation. Attired in the uniform of a major in the British Army, and with his right arm resting in a black silk sling, he entered the jeweler's store shortly before noon. It had been said by prison officials that McLean looked distinguished even in the shapeless convict uniforms, and in the uniform of a major he looked every bit of the part he was playing. The jeweler walked to the front of the store to greet the customer. Business hadn't been any too good and doubtless he thought the major to be a man of means.

"I'm looking for a wedding anniversary present for my wife," the major stated bluntly. "I want something nice, but I want a bargain which I've been told you might have. I have just returned from France and we are having a bit of a party tonight. What have you to show me?"

The jeweler beamed. "Shall it be a nice little wrist watch, Major?" he asked. "Or perhaps a diamond," he suggested.

"Neither," answered McLean. "My wife has two nice watches and an assortment of rings. What else can you suggest?"

The jeweler rubbed his chin reflectively. "I have it," he said. "Just what you want and something your wife will be proud of—a nice pearl necklace."

"That sounds interesting," the major said. "Let's have a look at some of them."

The jeweler produced several necklaces ranging in price from fifty to several hundreds of pounds, but none of these apparently met with the major's approval. He knew exactly what he wanted to carry out his plans and he didn't believe he had seen it yet.

"Those are all very nice," he said, "but hardly what I had in mind. I'm willing to spend a little more money, provided I can get a bargain. You see, the wife and I are contemplating going

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to Canada to stay permanently in about ten days and I want her to have something she can exhibit with pride."

"Going to Canada, you say?" The jeweler quickly replaced the trays. "Well, I think I have exactly what you want. Just step back here, please." He indicated a door leading to a small office in the rear of the store.

THE major followed. He knew now that he was on the right track. In the small office, the jeweler opened a wall safe, took a black box from it, unlocked it with a key taken from his pocket. The major's eyes widened as he gazed upon the assortment of jewelry.

"Here is something I am sure will meet all your requirements," the jeweler said, lifting a pearl necklace from the box and extending it to McLean.

This was not the first time McLean had handled pearls and he knew he was holding in his hands a necklace of considerable value. "Those are very nice," he said, "but I'm afraid you want more for them than I am prepared to pay."

"I hardly think so, Major," the jeweler smiled knowingly. "I was able to make a very good buy on those pearls and I'm willing to pass the bargain on to you. Shall we say fifteen hundred pounds?"

The major whistled softly. "I was afraid of that," he said. "Doubtless the necklace is worth all you are asking for it, but I am limited to an expenditure of one thousand pounds, and I'd like to go a little below that figure if possible."

"Twelve hundred," offered the jeweler. "And I won't be making a farthing."

The major dropped the pearls on the desk and shrugged his shoulders. "I wish I could do it," he said, "but a thousand is my top figure."

"Sold!" agreed the jeweler. "I'm losing money on the deal, but fellows like me who weren't able to go over there owe a lot to you chaps who did our fighting for us."

"Nonsense," smiled the major. "I'll wager you wanted to go even though you couldn't. Well, I'll see how much money I have with me. I left home hurriedly this morning and neglected to bring any large amount."

He unbuttoned a pocket of his tunic and brought forth several crumpled English and French notes and a broken and creased photograph of a woman. He pushed the photograph across the desk to the jeweler.

"That's the wife," he said. "I've carried that with me all through the war, but I'm afraid if she sees the condition of it she may charge me with not taking care of it. Have you an envelope I could place it in?"

"Certainly." The jeweler took a business envelope from a drawer and placed it in front of the major. "You are fortunate in having such a beautiful wife, Major," he said.

"Thank you." The major placed the photograph in the envelope and laid it aside. He straightened out the crumpled banknotes, counted them. "I have the equivalent of about twenty pounds here," he said. "Hardly a sufficient deposit on a thousand pound purchase."

"Your check will be acceptable, Major," the jeweler suggested.

"I HAVE no bank account at present," replied McLean. "I discontinued it during the war and haven't started it again because of our going to Canada. I keep a consider-

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able amount of money at home, but as I have some other business to attend to today I'll hardly have time to go home and get it."

"How about sending the necklace out C.O.D.?" the jeweler offered.

"No," said the major. "That won't do. It is to be a surprise for the wife. I suppose the better way will be to call a messenger boy, send a note to the wife for the money and have it brought here. Then I can drop in late this afternoon and pick up the necklace."

"That is a good suggestion," said the jeweler, falling right into McLean's trap, "but I don't know if it would be advisable to use a messenger boy to carry such a large sum of money. The company, of course, would make good any loss, but there would be considerable delay. I have a taxi-driver whom I have used a number of times to carry large sums of money. I know he is absolutely reliable and I am sure he will carry out your instructions without giving your wife any inkling as to what the money is to be used for. If you care to use him I shall be glad to tell you where you can find him."

"That'll be fine," said the major. "I'll just write a note to the wife telling her to give the taxi-driver a thousand pounds. That will excite her curiosity. Have you a sheet of paper I can use?"

The jeweler produced one of his letterheads and the major picked up a pen with his left hand. Laboriously, he wrote several letters, then the pen stuck into the paper and splattered ink all over the sheet.

"It's no use," he said, placing the pen and ink splattered paper on the desk. "I simply can't get used to using that left hand. Would you mind writing a few lines for me?"

"Not at all." The jeweler produced a clean sheet of paper and awaited instructions. "How shall I word it, Major?" he asked.

"Just say: 'Dear Wife: Please give bearer 1,000 pounds.' That will be enough."

The jeweler wrote the message, then looked up. "Shall I sign it for you, Major?" he asked.

"If you don't mind," McLean said. "Just sign it 'Egbert'."

"Egbert!" the jeweler exclaimed, with pen poised in mid-air. "Why, that is also my name. What a coincidence!"

"It is indeed," the major smiled. "I wonder if that name caused you to have as many school-day fights as it did me."

"Quite a few," the jeweler said reminiscently. "I've often wondered why parents burden their offspring with such names."

"Well," said the major, "if you'll address me an envelope and tell me how to find your taxi-driver I'll be on my way. I have quite a few matters to attend to today."

The jeweler signed the note and addressed an envelope in accordance with the major's instructions. The address given was in a fashionable part of the city. McLean listened to the jeweler tell how the taxi-driver could be identified, told him he would have the money brought to the store and return later in the afternoon to pick up the necklace. He shook hands with the jeweler and left the store.

III

UPON leaving the jeweler's store, McLean walked rapidly to a small hotel where he had registered the previous night. Entering his room he removed the sling from his

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arm, tore open the envelope the jeweler had addressed, took the letter from it and placed it in the envelope he had obtained to protect the photograph. The latter was addressed to the jeweler's wife. McLean had no difficulty in imitating the jeweler's hand-writing. These matters taken care of, he removed his uniform and donned civilian clothing. He was now ready to take the final step in his plan.

Walking the short distance to Charing Cross Station, he found the taxi-driver, whose number the jeweler had given him, just returning from a call. McLean explained briefly to him that the jeweler had a customer in his store and wanted this letter delivered and the package returned to the station where he, McLean, would wait for it. He promised the driver a generous tip if he returned promptly.

While waiting for the taxi-driver's return, McLean paced up and down, his mind reviewing each step he had taken in his well-planned scheme. He decided that he had covered every point, that there could be no slip-up. He had evolved the perfect crime. His thoughts were disturbed by the return of the taxi which stopped at the curb with a grinding of brakes. The driver had made good time.

McLean's eyes swept the street looking for anyone who resembled an officer, then he saw the oblong package in the driver's hand. He walked over to meet him. Taking the package from the driver's hand, he thrust a pound note in the palm, wheeled and was off down the street at a fast pace.

McLean's mind was racing as he went down the Strand. He decided that he wouldn't wait to return either to the hotel room or to the apartment where he had been making his headquarters. He would leave his belongings behind, catch the first train for Liverpool, where he was confident a hundred pounds, or more if necessary, would arrange for his transportation to the United States and his entry into the country without having to pass through the customs.

He was heading for Waterloo Station where he hoped he would find a train leaving immediately for any point in the general direction of Liverpool. He was just turning off the Strand into Waterloo Road when a man tapped him on the arm. He slackened his pace.

"I beg your pardon," spoke the stranger, "but you're an American, are you not?"

"Why, yes," answered McLean. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm an officer," replied the other, showing his credentials. "I should like to see your passport."

"Oh, to be sure," said McLean, obviously relieved. He reached in his hip pocket where he always carried his forged passport. His hand came away empty. He pawed frantically in all his pockets, but could not find the passport.

"I do have one somewhere," insisted McLean.

"I shall have to detain you until such time as you can identify yourself through the American Consul," said the officer.

McLEAN tried to recall where he could have lost the passport. He considered the possibility of having dropped it in the hotel room, but knew that if he took the officer there the British Army uniform would excite his suspicions and there would be more explaining to do. He also realized that he would face the same situation if he took the officer to the

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apartment where there were a number of other uniforms, blank checks and other incriminating evidence.

After seeing that his arguments were failing to impress the officer he accompanied him to the Marlborough Police Station where he was booked as being held for investigation.

McLean had recovered some of his usual poise when he reached the police station, and as he was being booked and searched he spoke to the desk sergeant, grasping at a last straw to save him from what he thought was certain doom.

"That package," he said, pointing to the parcel of money, "contains business documents of a private nature. I should appreciate it very much if you would not open it until such time as I can arrange my release which I am sure will be within a few hours."

The desk sergeant courteously informed him that he had no desire to pry into his business affairs and that the package would be placed in the safe unopened. Locked in a large cell, McLean paced the floor, wondering what British prisons were like and if he would be identified as a deserter from the Canadian Army. He was not left long in doubt.

It was about nine o'clock that night and McLean was lying on his bed resting from the hours of pacing the floor. He heard someone call, "Major," and being caught off guard, he jumped to the floor and faced the door. Standing outside the cell, beside a police sergeant, stood the jeweler. He held the package of money in his hand and it had been opened.

"I was beginning to get a little worried," he told McLean smilingly, "when I found you hadn't delivered the money I entrusted you with. Of course, I knew you hadn't absconded with it, but I was afraid something had happened to you. If you'll just sign this order the sergeant will turn the money over to me. I'm sorry to see you in here, but the sergeant tells me that the American Consul doesn't seem to know anything about you, so I suppose I can't help you. I'm sorry, old chap."

McLean's quick brain grasped the fact that the jeweler was giving him a break in pretending that he knew him, perhaps had told the officers that he was an employee. He took the order for the money and signed it, using the name under which he had been booked. The sergeant walked back to his desk and McLean was left alone with the jeweler.

"You're a little bit of all right," he told the jeweler, "and I appreciate the break you're giving me, but please tell me how you learned where I was."

"It was rather simple," the jeweler replied, feeling good now that he had recovered his money. "When I returned home this evening my wife asked me if I had bought the theater tickets she had asked for. I told her I didn't recall her telling me to get any, and then she said she had written on the back of my letterhead and returned it with the money she had sent me. I knew I hadn't sent for any money today, so I realized that I had been beat.

"I thought I was left 'holding the bag,' as you Yankees call it, but I picked up an evening newspaper and saw an account of your arrest which gave your description. I put two and two together, came down here and told them you had been my employee, and they permitted me to inspect the package. The rest you know. You are very fortunate that I do not care to prosecute you. Always remember, er—

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Major, that dishonesty never pays. You may plan a perfect crime, but you can't forestall fate. Good evening to you."

McLean had no recourse but to admit to being a deserter. He was returned to camp, but due to the fact that most of the soldiers had been discharged, he was permitted to take a short term in a disciplinary barracks from which place he was, in a few weeks, returned to Canada. He received a discharge that he never cared to exhibit, for it was marked, "for misconduct," but doubtless he received some consolation from the fact that his dice and cards were not guilty of misconduct on the return trip on the boat, for he landed in Canada with the most of his shipmates' money.

Cipher Solvers' Club for July

(*Continued from Last Week*)

Readers who sent us one or more answers to ciphers Nos. 157-80, inclusive, published in our cipher department in July, will find their names duly credited in the following list. Altogether, 5,136 solutions were submitted to the July brain twisters, raising our solving total for the year to 42,302 answers! Great work, cryptofans! Members of our Inner Circle Club, who have individual records of 1,000 or more answers, are indicated below by asterisks. The Cipher Solvers' Club for August will be published soon. Watch for it!

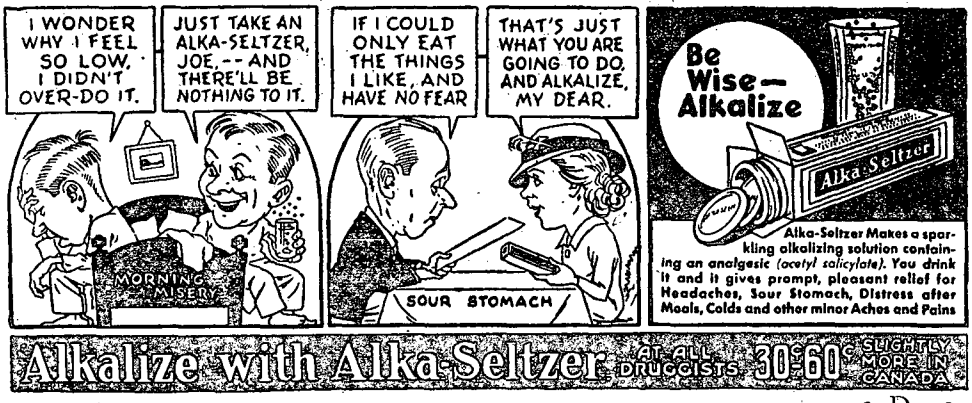
Twenty-three—Ernest G. Alstadt, Erie, Pa.; Arrowhead, Pawtucket, R. I.; *Mrs. W. C. Bird, San Francisco, Calif.; Gold Bug, Newburgh, N. Y.; *C. F., Baltimore, Md.; Dr. S. F. Hedgcock, Glencoe, Ill.; *Jayem, Bellingham, Wash.; Hard Boiled One, San Francisco, Calif.; Nickle-Plate, Saranac Lake, N. Y.; Posius, Brookline, Mass.; Rengaw, Chicago, Ill.; Ruth, Laramie, Wyo.; J. C. Schock, New York, N. Y.; Kay Vee See, Seattle, Wash.; Box Six, Lapeer, Mich.; Stas, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman, Los Angeles, Calif.; Sunny, Chicago, Ill.; W. R. W., Chicago, Ill.

Twenty-two—Attempt (1st-4th), Akron, Ohio; B. D. Bill, Chicago, Ill.; R. L. Blada, Newark, N. J.; H. H., Coventry, Ohio; Fae Malon, Englehart, Ontario, Canada; *Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill.; Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio; Susy Pumphandle, Johnstown, Pa.; *Hugh B. Rossell, Washington, D. C.; Charles E. Zirbes, Clinton, Iowa.

Twenty-one—Alpha Bet, Merchantville, N. J.; L. P. Janlin, Newburgh, N. Y.; J. G. Meerdink, Jersey City, N. J.; *Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J.; Quay, Springfield, Ill.; *Alvin Robb, London, Ontario, Canada; George Shakeshaft, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; D. G. S., Colusa, Calif.; Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. Dak.

Twenty—Daffy Dill, Bangor, Me.; Eatosin, Marietta, Ohio; G. N. G., Key West, Fla.; Mrs. Josephine Johnson, Pittsburgh, Kans.; Neil Johnson, Manchester, Iowa; Julia Kots, Bronx, N. Y.; Cecil T. Partner, Kokomo, Ind.; B. P., Miami, Fla.; John T. Straiger, Brooklyn, N. Y.

(*Continued on Page* 61)


I WONDER WHY I FEEL SO LOW. I DIDN'T OVER-DO IT.
JUST TAKE AN ALKA-SELTZER, JOE.--AND THERE'LL BE NOTHING TO IT.
MORNING MISERY
IF I COULD ONLY EAT THE THINGS I LIKE, AND HAVE NO FEAR
THAT'S JUST WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO. AND ALKALIZE, MY DEAR.
SOUR STOMACH
Be Wise—Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
Alkalize with Alka-Seltzer
AT ALL DRUGGISTS 30-60¢ SLIGHTLY MORE IN CANADA
3 D—3

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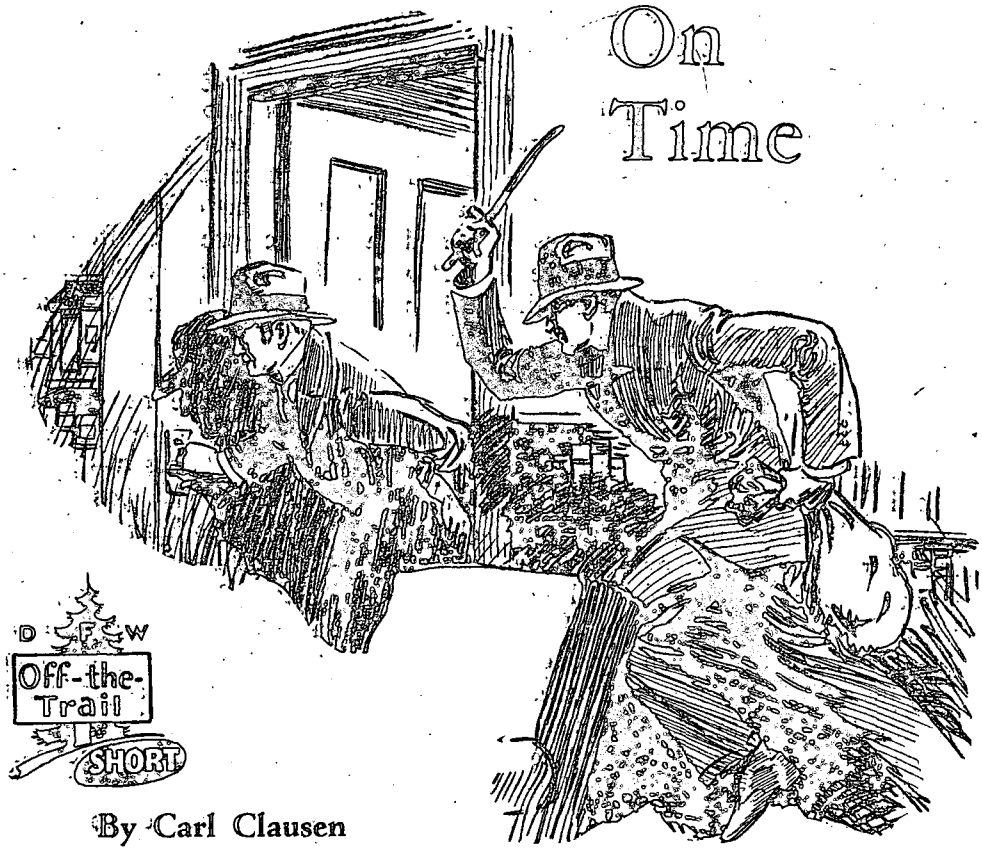
On Time



Off-the-Trail SHORT

By Carl Clausen

Drake struck at him with all his force

THE thing that galled Drake more than anything else was the fact that James Fleming humbled him by offering him the job as janitor. Fleming's explanation that as he had already turned the business over to his employees, he could not do altogether as he wished, although he was still nominally the president of the Universal Numbering Machine Company, looked to Drake as a not very clever alibi.

Drake accepted the post as janitor. There was nothing else he could do. He was without funds.

He was conscious of the hostile looks of the other employees as he went about his task of sweeping the floor in the great factory, half of which might have been his but for this thing called fortune. At least that was what Drake chose to call it.

He also chose to forget that his present predicament was of his own making. In common with men of his kind who made their own uncomfortable beds, he spent most of his time lying out of it. It never occurred to him that he was, himself, to blame for the misfortune that had overtaken him,

Plan Your Alibi Carefully. The Coroner Will Get You if You Don't Watch Out!

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and that James Fleming was where he was, because he had had faith in the clever little machines he manufactured, and vision to see their possibilities.

Twenty years earlier Drake and Fleming had been partners in the business. The Universal Numbering Machine Company had then been housed in a remodeled barn near the Harlem River. The partners had carried the enterprise under their hats, so to speak. Drake, the brilliant and restless one, had attended to the marketing of their product.

Jim Fleming, the careful, plodding mechanic had handled the manufacturing end. They had plugged along together for several years making a living, but getting nowhere, as Drake pointed out often to his partner. Twice the little shop had been enlarged cautiously by Fleming. Drake had wanted to engage large capital and build a modern factory, but Fleming had been content to grow slowly and conservatively.

The break between the partners had widened from year to year. Finally, Drake had offered to buy the other out or to sell to him. Fleming had taken him up on the spot with a promptitude that had all but taken Drake's breath away—it was so unlike the cautious and slow-thinking Fleming. Before he, Drake, knew it, he found himself with a letter of credit for fifty thousand dollars, the amount Fleming had paid him for his half interest, and with which Drake hoped—to conquer the world.

The fact that it had conquered *him* while his ex-partner prospered, Drake considered no fault of his own. Fleming had got all the breaks, while he, Drake, had got none. Misfortune had attended all his enterprises, until at the age of fifty-five, he had come back, bankrupt and embittered, forced to accept any crumb which his ex-partner chose to throw his way. He had come back to find the one-horse shack a great factory with a thousand employees, and his old partner of dinner bucket days coming to the office in an imported car with colored chauffeur.

It was a bitter pill to swallow and it poisoned Drake with a venom deadlier than the cobra's.

Fleming's gesture of turning the great factory over to the men who had helped to make him rich—in the manner of the modern Croesus—marked him in Drake's eyes as a poseur and charlatan. The job as janitor was the final insult. The statement that nothing better was available since every employee was a partner in the business, was just Jim Fleming's way of humbling him to the point of degradation, Drake told himself bitterly.

When a man has passed the half-century mark with that sort of philosophy, he becomes a menace to society and to himself.

JIM FLEMING, his ex-partner, was quite the opposite. He was a good ten years older than Drake, prematurely aged with the responsibilities of two decades of developing a great industry from a mortgaged and struggling one-horse enterprise. It had taken him better than five years to clean off the debt he had incurred in buying out Drake. Another five to introduce his product to the markets hitherto untapped, and to improve it with numerous intricate devices.

The Universal Numbering Machine, a product of Fleming's inventive brain, had come to be used by practically every government in the world as a protection against fraud for their currency, their revenue stamps and securi-

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ties. By the great foreign lotteries to prevent the forging of tickets. By numerous private concerns to protect themselves against the depredation of criminals.

Curiously enough, the little ingenious device—the machine was so small it could have been hidden in the hollow of one's palm—had come into its own with the advent of the depression. Governments casting about for new avenues of revenue and therefore needing numbered revenue stamps, kept the factory working day and night when other enterprises went into liquidation. The Universal Numbering Machine Company emerged from it stronger than ever, entrenched by its pioneering and protected by its patents.

Fleming was a small, slight man, but wiry and untiring. His capacity for work was incredible and his love of it, unflagging. He had been too busy to marry. The Universal Numbering Machine was his only child. It was small enough to be carried in his vest pocket and that was where he carried one always. He loved the feel of its smooth polished surface, loved to run the tips of his thin sensitive fingers across the faces of the numerals, cut from dies of the hardest tool steel. In this sense Jim Fleming was a pagan. He worshipped the thing because it was an expression of himself, his own inarticulate self, made articulate in terms of accomplishment.

Money no longer interested him. He had more than he could possibly use for the few years remaining to him. He had not wished to humble Drake by offering him cash. He, himself, the independent type, he would never have lowered himself by accepting charity. He had plans for Drake, but he knew that the man had to prove himself in the eyes of the others who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him through the struggle to success.

Drake's future would be up to himself. Had Drake known that he was being weighed by invisible scales, he might have acted differently; but he went about his tasks as janitor at night after the great factory had shut down and the machinery stood in silent rows, mocking him with their devilish ingenuity in producing those little contraptions that confuted the efforts of the corsairs of crime—and went about his simple tasks of sweeping and cleaning with rage and hatred consuming him.

He was alone in the factory except for Nelson, the night watchman, an elderly man about to be pensioned off. Even the pay of this useless old man was almost double that of his own. All Nelson was required to do was to go from patrol box to patrol box and ring his watchman's clock at certain stated intervals.

The man's shuffling gait reminded Drake poignantly that the time was not far off when his own feet would drag with the lead of time across the boards of the stage upon which he had played his part so indifferently.

THE post of night watchman is an important one. It partakes of the authority of the law. Nelson wore his patrolman's badge with an air. He carried his time clock by its strap like a prince, a scepter. Time was the essence of his existence. Once an hour he was required to ring this time clock at the twelve key stations at strategic points about the factory.

He was more than just a watchman. When the whistle blew at five o'clock and the thousand workers returned to their homes, Nelson took charge—became a commander in his own right, responsible for a million dollars' worth

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of property and the future of a thousand fellow workers. His route between the twelve stations was his quarter deck, the fire and burglar alarms, his crew, every member of which jumped to defense at the slightest movement of his old, gnarled fingers.

He treated Drake with a mixture of condescension and curiosity. Himself never having had more than five hundred dollars in his life at one time, he wondered how a man could have possessed fifty thousand and end up as janitor. It was a phenomenon beyond his comprehension. He was prepared to be regaled by Drake between ringing in at the stations, with lurid tales of Monte Carlo and steam yachts, so he allowed himself to be cultivated.

Drake had determined to cultivate him. Nelson was due to be pensioned off shortly. If he, Drake, could work himself into the other's graces as an understudy, he might fall heir to a sinecure. Better than a sinecure; so he professed a deep interest in Nelson's occupation. Allowed the old fellow to show him how it was done, and by subtle flattery managed to groom himself for Nelson's shoes. Had he known that Fleming was already considering him for the post, and had, in fact, negotiated with the insurance company to that effect, he would have been amused at how perfectly fate was dealing the hand for once.

A plan had occurred to him—a plan fraught with possibilities, so he suffered himself to be led by Nelson from station to station and learned the simple, yet apparently infallible, method by which property essayed to protect itself against the depredations of pirates.

Its very infallibility intrigued Drake. There are curious temperaments that drive their owners to attempt the seemingly impossible; temperaments that will work assiduously for months and years on some crafty scheme to obtain what they want rather than labor the same length of time in the simple channels that bring sure reward. Men and women who will rather gain a dollar by knavery than a hundred by honest application.

The cleverest of them are the occasional ones. Persons who have hitherto led comparatively blameless lives, but who in desperation at being reduced to straits, strike back at society. They are the most dangerous. There is no precedent for laying such a person by the heels. If he or she is caught, it is largely because of the unknown factor working against them. It has been said that no human mind can conceive a set of circumstances that dovetail so perfectly as to constitute an unbroken pattern. Hence, the reliability of circumstantial evidence.

WHEN Drake had first called on Fleming at his home at Maidstone-on-the-Hudson to see what he could do for him, he had been shown into the library by Brooks, the butler. The room was large and commodious, furnished in the somewhat heavy manner of a man who liked solidity and comfort. The walls and ceiling were panelled in oak, stained dark. The rug was a genuine Bokhara of deep purple, the windows of colored leaded glass. It was the library of a person of conservative tastes and the means to indulge in expensive things.

His greeting of Drake was hearty and without condescension, although he must have noted the unmistakable signs of indigence about the other. They discussed the past at length before Drake sounded him on the prospect of a position.

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Instead of replying at once, Fleming went to a small wall safe beside the fireplace and took from it a bundle of stock certificates which he spread out on the library table before Drake.

"This," he said, "represents my total holdings in the Universal Numbering Machine Company; enough to pay my salary as its president—no more. The rest of the stock is held in trust for my employees. This block of stock entitles me to just one vote, the same as the smallest stockholder. Actually, I have no more power than the youngest lathe-man. But I'll do what I can for you. My voice still carries a certain weight. You will have to be satisfied with a very minor position, at first, but I'll use what influence I have to make a place for you in time. Are you willing to accept these terms?"

Drake's first reaction was one of scorn and anger. He was on the point of denouncing his ex-partner as a liar, but Fleming's face was so utterly devoid of guile that Drake restrained himself and nodded agreement.

When Fleming returned the stock certificates to the safe, Drake looking over his shoulder noted that the safe contained several bundles of bank notes as well. He smiled sourly. In the old days Fleming had always insisted on keeping a large amount of cash on hand for an emergency. His horror of borrowing had been one of their bones of contention. In the twenty years he hadn't changed! Cautious as ever!

Drake tried to guess the amount in the safe and to speculate on what he could do with it. He left the house with resentment and injustice rankling in his mind.

The offer of the job as janitor was the last straw.

If Fleming noticed it, he gave no sign. His janitor was still his old partner. He went out of his way to show that Drake's low estate made no difference to him. Drake was a frequent guest at the house in Maidstone, when his duties permitted. A man of pride would not have accepted these invitations, but avarice and jealousy had destroyed every vestige of pride in Drake.

Seated in the panelled library with his old partner, he crucified himself with the thought of what those bundles of currency could do for him. Castigated himself like a priest of old until every thought was a whip to lash his waning courage into doing something about it.

ONE day as the two men were seated before the fire smoking, Drake drew from his pocket a diamond ring—a solitaire worth several hundred dollars, which he had bought during his days of affluence. He had, that very day, redeemed it from pawn—not from any sentimental reason, but because the ring was to be the first step in the plan he had been toying with for some time.

"I wonder," he said, "if you'll let me keep this in your wall safe. I took it out of pawn today. It's too valuable to keep in my room."

He handed the other the ring as he spoke. Fleming barely glanced at it. He did not care for jewelry and except for his shirt studs, had never owned a diamond.

"Of course," he replied. "I'll give you a receipt for it."

"Never mind. I guess I can trust my old partner," he said Drake with a wave of his hand.

"I appreciate the compliment. But we're business men. I might die and

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you'd have nothing to show that you were the owner of it."

He drew out a fountain pen and wrote the other a simple memorandum in receipt form.

"I'll put the ring in the safe right now," he added arising.

Drake had counted on that Fleming, the punctilious, would do just that. It was the vital part of his carefully-laid plan.

As his ex-partner leaned forward, adjusting his glasses and began to turn the knob of the combination, Drake, too leaned forward—almost imperceptibly. His eyesight being better than the older man's, he had no need of glasses. Quite easily he read off the figures over the other's shoulder as they came up, jotting them down on the back of the receipt Fleming had given him.

It was all so simple, so easy. He felt a strong desire to laugh at the other's credulity.

The first step of his plan had gone off according to schedule—better than on schedule—for as he arose to take his leave, Fleming said:

"You won't have to pawn the ring again. The insurance company has okayed my recommendation of you as night watchman, and Nelson put in a good word for you. You can take over your new duties on the first of the month if it suits you."

Drake tensed. For an instant he felt as if he were walking into a trap of his own making. He had the curious illusion that he were standing on the brink of an abyss whose horrific depth was pulling him off balance. A javelin of chill air seemed to strike the back of his neck. So real was it that he glanced over his shoulder to assure himself that a window had not been left open.

"That's mighty kind of you, Jim," he said as Fleming saw him to the door.

"Not at all," the other retorted smiling. "You were not too proud to take a menial job temporarily. Good luck."

Once outside, Drake breathed deeply. He ran his hand over his forehead and discovered that it was damp as with a chill dew. He wiped it with his handkerchief.

At a corner saloon he bought a drink to steady his nerves. The shock of success had been almost too much, so used had he become to accept failure. A second drink and he was back to normal. He smiled as he thought of the bundles of currency in Fleming's wall safe. No one would suspect him. His alibi had been prepared by the very law he was going to break so cleverly. It was iron-clad. Time was its essence.

HE went about his new duties as night watchman with a show of responsibility that won him approval from the insurance company from the very outset. He was a less frequent visitor in the big house in Maidstone and then only on occasional afternoons. Often enough, however, to observe and make mental note of the comings and goings of the servants and the habits of the household. Of the location of the servants' quarters, of Jim Fleming's day to day routine.

Thursday nights, Fleming spent at his club, a business men's organization, returning from there no earlier than one A.M. and letting himself in with a pass key. This was the butler's and the cook's night off, also, since the master was away. The maid's room was on the third floor, and the colored chauffeur who slept at home, drove the car there after taking Fleming to the

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club and returned in the morning to take him to the factory. From late afternoon until nearly an hour after midnight, the house would be unprotected, except for the maid and the patrol man who made his night rounds of the subdivision, ringing in at his boxes at widely scattered points. He was paid by the Maidstone Development Company and was supposed to protect a subdivision of some eighty acres of suburban estates, facing four streets. A twenty-two rifle would have been about as efficacious against a Big Bertha.

Drake had ascertained that the patrol box nearest the Fleming residence was a good three hundred feet distant, on a corner of the next street. After ringing there at eleven, the patrol man passed the house and did not return to that street until after one, A.M.

Brooks, the butler and the cook were man and wife. They visited their daughter in Mineola, Long Island, every Thursday night and returned on a late train which brought them back to the house about the same time the patrol man rang his box an hour after midnight. For practically two hours the coast would be clear except for the maid who would be asleep on the third floor.

Drake decided upon the hour of midnight, or a little before, to allow for possible miscalculations.

For a month, he went about the great factory at his task of ringing in, making it a point to be prompt. Not once did his time clock show more than ten seconds variation. The insurance company was pleased. Drake smiled. He was there to please them.

A new janitor had been engaged. This man worked from six A.M. until nine A.M., and from four-thirty in the afternoon until eight-thirty at night, as Drake had worked when he had the job. After eight-thirty P.M. and before six A.M., Drake had the place to himself. He was required to ring in at each station once every hour. As there were twelve stations, he would start on his rounds at ten minutes before the hour at box number one. The boxes were spaced two minutes apart, the time it took him to walk from one to the next. The entire round took him exactly twenty-two minutes. The remaining thirty-eight minutes of each hour he was free to spend reading in his chair by the radiator next to the office.

It was a sinecure and the pay was excellent; but Drake had other plans.

AT each of the twelve stations there was a little red-painted iron box fastened to the wall with screws. The heads of the screws were imbedded in solder, so that if anyone essayed to remove them, it would be at once discovered unless the solder was replaced. Each box contained a key that fitted the time clock, which Drake carried from station to station by a leather strap, and each key was fastened to the iron box by a short length of steel chain run through the box and clamped to the back side of it with a small seal of solder. The keys could not be detached from the boxes without first removing the boxes from the wall and destroying this seal.

The clock was an ingenious device. Its intricate mechanism contained the works, a circular paper disk with ninety-five lines radiating from the center in a circle, each space between the lines representing a fifteen minute interval. Half of this paper disk was marked NIGHT, the other half DAY. When the proper key was inserted and turned,

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it registered on the paper disk within fifteen seconds of when it was rung. The clock was checked for accuracy every day by the insurance inspector, the paper disk removed daily and a new one inserted. The company could tell at a glance within fifteen seconds of when the clock was rung at each station.

It was infallible.

It was its very infallibility that intrigued Drake. The twelve iron boxes were quite small—just large enough to hold the keys fastened to them, and the keys were less than three inches long. These keys were made of tool steel. To have made duplicates of them would would have been practically impossible. Each key differed slightly from the other—minutely, rather—so minutely that only the most skilled mechanic with the most delicate tools could have counterfeited them.

Drake had no intention of wasting time over the keys. His plan was a much simpler one.

The following Thursday afternoon, he called at the house in Maidstone and smoked a cigar in the library with the unsuspecting Fleming, ascertaining by casual and adroit queries that the routine of the household had not been changed. Brooks, the butler and his wife had already left for Mineola. They had left earlier than usual because their daughter was ill. Fleming was going to his club for dinner.

Before leaving Drake found opportunity to unfasten one of the windows on pretext of admiring the view of the Hudson River.

He was strangely calm that night as he went about the silent factory at his task of ringing in. There were times when it seemed almost as if another man—a stranger—walked beside him on his rounds, and that this stranger performed his duties for him mechanically.

At eighty-thirty, the janitor left, and he was alone. As the hour advanced panic possessed him at the thought of what he meant to do. Several times during the night he considered abandoning the whole idea. To commit a crime requires a sort of perverse courage, and Drake had very little courage—even of the perverted kind.

As he rang in at eleven o'clock he poured himself a strong drink of whiskey to steady his nerves. He had gone too far to withdraw, now.

When he was finished with his round he went swiftly from box to box and removed the screws by which they were fastened to the wall. He put the small boxes with the keys attached in a canvas sack which he had brought along for that purpose. Then he picked up the time clock and left the factory by the rear door. He walked swiftly to the next street where he had left his car.

The drive to Maidstone took him exactly twenty-five minutes.

DRAKE parked the car outside the Maidstone Estates and walked swiftly across lots to the Fleming residence. He met no one. Pausing in the shadows of the dense evergreens that surrounded the house, to slip on a pair of gloves, he reconnoitered. There was no light in the maid's room. The girl had gone to bed.

He glanced at the time clock. It was just time for him to begin ringing in. He rang in station number one with the appropriate key, then tried the library window. It opened easily with the short iron bar he had brought along. He made it a point to gouge the sill before hoisting himself through,

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the window. Once inside, he inserted the flat of the iron bar under the catch, breaking it, to make it appear that a professional burglar had been at work.

He stood listening for a moment to assure himself that the snapping of the catch had not awakened the maid. The house was still. The only sound was the slow measured ticking of his watchman's clock, slower than ordinary clocks. It heartened him with its reminder of his cleverness.

He rang in station number two, then tiptoed to the safe, turned the thin javelin of his searchlight on the dial and began to twirl it. His heart beat faster as he listened for the tumbler to fall. When it finally did, it echoed in the deepest recess of his jubilant brain. Pulling the door open, he clawed at the contents with his gloved hands. Found his diamond ring, stuffed three bundles of currency into his overcoat pocket, and rang station number three.

He tensed, listening. For an instant he thought that he heard the sound of a key turning in the outer door, but decided that his nerves were playing a trick on him.

Inserting the iron bar between the hinges of the open safe door he pried until the door came loose. He laid it carefully on the floor, then rang in station number four. He would have just time to get out of the window and gain the shelter of the evergreens for station five.

Switching off his searchlight, he started for the window with the canvas sack containing the small metal boxes and the time clock, when he thought he heard a sound again. He strained his ears. His right hand closed about the iron bar until the sharp edges bit into his fingers. He knew then that he had not been mistaken. Soft, cautious footsteps were slithering across the inch-deep Bokhara rug, not more than twenty feet distant.

His heart drove the blood into his fear-maddened brain. Crouching and gripping the iron bar yet tighter, he held his breath. All at once the room was flooded with light. His leap at the intruder was reflex action actuated by insane fear. The intruder's back was turned. It was Brooks. The butler's fingers had hardly left the light switch when the heavy iron bar came down on his skull with a crash.

Drake jumped aside as the figure dropped at his feet with scarcely a sound. The man made no movement. Switching the light off again, Drake gained the open window in three short leaps and dropped to the ground. In his hurry and fear he almost forgot to ring station five. He fumbled in the canvas sack for the right key and managed to insert it in the time clock just fifteen seconds after two minutes to twelve.

He darted across the vacant lot and gained his car, paused just long enough to ring station six, then released the emergency brake and coasted down the hill, so as not to disturb the neighborhood by starting the car. At the bottom of the grade, he threw the clutch in and drove on until it was time to ring station seven.

He was almost a fourth of the way back to the factory when he had rung the last station. As he passed across the Harlem River bridge, he threw the iron bar and the gloves into the river.

He knew that he was safe in spite of the mishap. He was absolutely sure that the butler had not seen him. He wasn't sure of how hard he had hit him. He wondered . . . but dismissed the thought. Time enough to worry about that later. . . .

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HE let himself through the rear door of the factory, and fell to work at once replacing the boxes. After inserting the screws tightly, he soldered the head with a hot soldering iron and a gasoline torch, inspecting each screw minutely, then removed all traces of his soldering operations and hid the bundles of currency and the diamond ring in a safe place. Each bundle contained five thousand dollars in ten-dollar notes. The three bundles were still done up in the bank's paper bands.

With daylight he felt more secure. Except for the unlooked-for return of Brooks an hour before his scheduled time, everything had gone off on schedule. Drake wondered what had happened. Not that it mattered, but he was curious to know what unforeseen contingency had arisen to all but upset his perfect plan. He wondered again how hard he had struck, but dismissed the thought resolutely.

At six-fifteen, all uncertainty was dispelled. The janitor coming to work brought the morning paper in with him from the steps as was his habit.

The man's agitation was manifest. "Read this, Drake!" he said handing the other the paper.

Headlines were splashed across the face of it. It had made the morning edition.

Under the caption, the whole thing in detail. The broken window latch, the rifled safe. An old man found by his returning master, dying with his skull crushed by an unknown assailant. The word UNKNOWN danced before Drake's eyes. The hour of the crime definitely set at midnight or a little after.

He dropped into his chair, utterly exhausted with relief.

"And I talked with him only yesterday," he muttered. "Such is life."

The janitor took the paper into Fleming's office and laid it on the president's desk, as he always did, then went to the locker and got out his brooms and pail.

Drake remained sitting in the chair until it was time to ring the seven o'clock round. Then, he arose and picked up the time clock and walked to station number one softly, as if he were carrying something fragile.

On the way home he called Fleming's residence. He had debated at length upon the advisability of this move, deciding finally that it was the decent and natural thing to do. He was Fleming's old partner; had been in the house often enough to make his concern for Brooks seem genuine.

A man's voice answered the telephone, a crisp voice, not Fleming's.

"Who is this speaking?" the voice demanded.

Drake identified himself.

"Mr. Fleming is out at the moment. This Lieutenant Ames of the Metropolitan Squad. Any message you wish to leave?"

"Only that I saw in the morning paper what had happened—and that I—I'm sorry," Drake replied. It was his first brush with the police, and it was an effort to keep his voice steady.

"I'll tell Mr. Fleming that you called. Leave your number please."

It was a command, not a request.

"Mr. Fleming has it. I'm the night watchman at the plant."

"And your address and telephone number?" the voice insisted.

Drake gave them to him. The man hung up with a curt "thanks." As Drake replaced the receiver on the hook, his hand shook. He steadied himself against the wall of the telephone booth. The air of the small

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compartment made him faint. He emerged from it gasping for breath and jumped into his car and drove to his rooming house.

HE was awakened early in the afternoon by a knock on his door. His sleep-drenched brain leaped into apprehension at once. But, it was only his landlady telling him that Mr. Fleming was on the telephone. Drake slipped into his trousers and went to the hall to answer the call.

"I wanted to tell you that your diamond ring was taken, too," his ex-partner said. "Detective Lieutenant Ames would like you to step over this afternoon before you go to work. He wants a detailed description of the ring. I'm unable to give it to him. I didn't examine it very closely. Can you be here in an hour or so?"

"Yes — of course, Jim," Drake heard himself say. "I'll be right over." His voice sounded hollow and hoarse in the cavernous hall. As he hung up, he glanced about to see if his landlady had been listening, but the hall was empty.

He went back to his room and dressed slowly. Over and over again, he told himself that there was nothing to worry about. No one had seen him. His alibi was perfect. The time clock was an indisputable witness. A man could not be in two places at once. The paper had stated that Fleming had come in a little after twelve-thirty and found Brooks, his butler, dying. He had died in Fleming's arms before the other had had time to report to the police. The butler had left Mineola, Long Island on the eleven-five train, which would have put him at the house in Maidstone around midnight. His wife had stayed the night with their daughter who was ill.

In spite of the mounting fears, Drake told himself that he was safe. His time clock would show that he had rung in at the plant until twelve minutes after midnight, beginning again at ten minutes before one o'clock. Enough of his time was accounted for to make it impossible that he could have been to Maidstone and back again at any time during the night.

Nevertheless, his brain was filled with a curious indefinable apprehension as he rang the bell of the Fleming residence, half an hour later. An officer in uniform opened the door and inquired his business. When he stated it and the man stood aside to let him enter, Drake hesitated for the fraction of a minute, then taking hold of himself, he strode through the door. The officer led the way to the library, where a tall, dark man was closeted with Jim Fleming.

The man rose as Drake entered.

"Detective Lieutenant Ames," said Fleming. "Sit down."

Drake permitted himself the faintest of smiles in acknowledgment of the introduction. The stranger's dark eyes rested upon him gravely for a moment. Drake met him squarely and walked to the chair indicated.

As he eased himself into it, his downcast eyes came to rest upon a dull, dark stain on the rug directly in front of it. Almost involuntarily he raised his foot, a javelin of fear stabbing his brain like a red hot needle. He glanced out of the tail of his eye at the lieutenant, but the officer was consulting a little black note book. Drake let his foot drop back on the rug and waited, his heart racing furiously.

"The ring was a solitaire weighing about — how much?" Ames asked pleasantly.

Drake moistened his lips.

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"Two and one half carats—a fraction over," he replied.

"White gold or platinum?" Ames queried.

"White gold. Old-fashioned setting," said Drake. The sound of his own voice heartened him. "I bought it in Amsterdam several years ago." He managed a smile. "And I paid the duty on it," he added.

Ames nodded. "Rosette cut, I suppose?"

"I believe that's what it's called," Drake replied with a deprecatory smile.

"I mean it was round—not marquise or pear-shaped?"

"No, round."

"I see. It may help us. The murderer may try to pawn it."

At the word MURDERER, a red-hot iron seemed to be driven into Drake's brain, searing its way through every last hidden convolution. It was with a supreme effort that he forced himself to say:

"I hope so, sir."

HE glanced covertly at Fleming. His ex-partner was sitting slumped forward in his chair, his chin drooping on his chest. He seemed to have suddenly grown years older. Ames went on making notes in the little black book. Above the faint scratching of his fountain pen, Drake heard the beat of his own heart, also, he thought, a slow measured beat like the ticking of a clock—not an ordinary clock, but a very specific one—his time clock. So real was the illusion that his eyes darted about the room, in spite of the fact that he remembered distinctly that there was no clock in Fleming's library.

He was brought back to the present by Lieutenant Ames saying:

"The murderer may, of course, remove the stone from its setting and melt the gold down. He will if he's as clever as we think he is."

Drake swallowed hard. He tried to think of an adequate reply, but his tongue felt numb.

When Ames got up and walked to the window and examined the broken catch, he felt safe, once more, and when the Lieutenant crossed to the safe and stood looking at it with a puzzled frown, Drake could have laughed at his fears.

Suddenly Ames said:

"You're quite sure, Mr. Fleming, that no one but Brooks and yourself had the combination?"

Fleming raised his head wearily: "I am positive. We both committed it to memory when the safe people gave it to me. There never was a written memorandum of it at any time."

Ames stood turning the small wrecked safe door over between his long slender fingers. His thin aquiline features were expressionless, his dark eyes unfathomable.

"I'm afraid that I shall have to disagree with you on that point, sir," he said.

In the silence that followed this remark, Drake heard again that slow measured beat—that devastating familiar beat of his time clock. He clutched the arms of his chair, forcing himself to meet the detective's dark questing eyes steadily. What if Ames *did* suspect—something! His alibi was perfect.

Ames crossed to the mantel, stood there leaning against it, tapping a cigarette on his thin bony wrist—tapped it slowly as if keeping time to the slow, measured ticking that beat upon Drake's harassed brain, like a thousand riveters' hammers. Not a word did he say, merely kept tapping his cigarette.

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In that horrible silence the ticking seemed to grow louder and louder, seemed to come from all directions of that great panelled room—now far, now near, echoing and re-echoing to the deepest recesses of Drake's guilty mind.

Finally, when he thought he could not stand it a moment longer, the detective reached one long arm into the bronze urn beside the fireplace. It came out holding what Drake had feared the most—his time clock.

He sprang to his feet as Ames put it on the mantel—tore at his terror-stricken eyes to banish the vision, screamed with terror and fell to the floor blubbering for mercy.

"Getting Mr. Fleming to put your ring in the safe so you could read the combination off, is an old, old trick, Drake. Brooks is dead, but he lived long enough to give us the clue to his murderer. He heard a clock, not a watch, but a large clock—ticking slowly but distinctly in a room that has never contained a clock since the house was built. Heard it before you struck him down."

He leaned forward and snapped a pair of handcuffs about the wrists of Drake's protesting hands. "Now, then, where did you hide the money and the ring? You may as well come clean. We'll find it. . . . At the plant? I thought so. Let's go and get it!"

Cipher Solvers' Club for July

(*Continued from Page 48*)

Nineteen—H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y.; Gene Miller, Petersburg, Ind.; W. B. Nye, Flint, Mich.; Octogenarian, Fancy Prairie, Ill.; Flo Rogoway, San Diego, Calif.; E. Smith, New York, N. Y.

Eighteen—Denarius, Detroit, Mich.; The Red Duke, New York, N. Y.; Jay Essee, Plattsburg, N. Y.; H. C. Fetterolf, Palmyra, Pa.; Keystonian, New York, N. Y.; Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.; Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; David Seltzer, New York, N. Y.; Texocron, New York, N. Y.

Seventeen—Dick Cooper, Atlantic City, N. J.; Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oreg.; Ralph B. McEwen, New Bedford, Mass.

Sixteen—Jack IV, Boston, Mass.; Karl D. Sherley, Tacoma, Wash.

Fifteen—Myrtle Lee Bunn, Washington, D. C.; My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y.

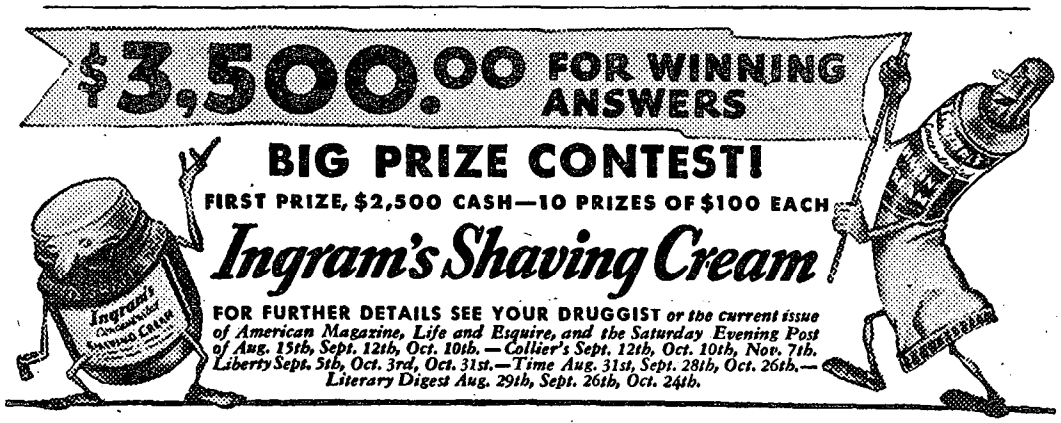
Fourteen—Illy, Akron, Ohio; Wash, Portland, Me.

Thirteen—Guy Faulkener, Ossining, N. Y.

Twelve—Arulas, Los Angeles, Calif.; Wm. Atherton, Fargo, N. Dak.; A Has-Been, Union Grove, Wis.; G. J. D., Philadelphia, Pa.; Ah-Tin-Du, St. Paul, Minn.; Ritz-E-Fritz, Berkeley, Calif.; Margaret Holmes, New London, Conn.; Mrs. S. L. Johnson, Ocala, Fla.; Kappa Kappa, Seattle, Wash.; Edward F. Raiford, Holland, Va.; L. J. Yanchus, Masontown, Pa.

Eleven—Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky.; Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa.; Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.; Edw. E. Szymanski, New York, N. Y.; N. Dak. Ump, Gilby, N. Dak.

(*Continued on Page 74*)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Paul C. Pitt Invests His Entire Capital in a Scheme That Pays Mr. Skutter 100 Per Cent in Grief

Mr. Skutter was caught off guard

SPECIAL SHORT

D F W

Mr. Dillping *to* Mr. Skutter

By J. Lane Linklater

STANDING at a respectable distance, a number of the idle people of the little town of Nelhi were staring at the limousine at the curb, awed into silence by its suggestion of splendor. Its handsome, Roman-featured owner, Paul C. Pitt, was in the modest café a few steps away, consuming a peaceful lunch with his huge, meaty-faced chauffeur.

The one waitress, obviously a local girl, was standing near the kitchen door, her eyes fixed in wonder on Pitt, whose tall and gracious splendor had obviously entranced her.

Pitt seemed serenely happy. "Dan," he said to the chauffeur, "what a delightful quiet place!"

But Dan was far from happy. "Maybe, boss. But it's a swell place

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for the law to catch up with us. You get every body squinting at you in a burg like this. Now, in a big burg—"

"You're just a little nervous, Dan," Pitt twitted him, "about the pictures on the post office wall. But don't worry—you never did take a very good picture."

"Okay," mumbled Dan. "But that ain't all. It's another courthouse town. That means a sheriff. And I'm damn glad we ain't gonna stop here. As soon as we're through eating—"

"But I'm not so sure of that," Pitt retorted lightly.

Dan stared. "What do you mean by that? There ain't nothing doing here—"

"I'm not so sure of that, either," chuckled Pitt.

Dan was morosely silent. He had learned to respect Pitt's powers of observation—his ability to sense the threat of conflict under life's most placid surfaces. Paul C. Pitt modestly ascribed that ability to what he called the seventh sense of discernment. Whatever it was, Dan was aware that they certainly needed it, since, except for the imposing limousine, it was Pitt's only stock in trade.

"This is an unusually small town, Dan," Pitt went on conversationally, "for a county seat. An old place, I should judge. However, business may pick up here in a few months. Someone left a copy of the local paper here on the table, and I see there's talk of the government's establishing an experimental work camp in the vincinity. Incidentally, I saw the sheriff—"

"What?" exploded Dan.

Pitt smiled. "The sheriff, Dan. You'll remember that we sat in the car outside there for a few minutes before coming in here. Evidently you weren't watching very closely. I saw two men in a doorway not far away. One of them brushed his coat aside and disclosed a badge. They seemed to be keeping out of sight."

Pitt seemed very calm, indeed cheerful. But Dan had lost his appetite. "Why not blow outer this town right now, boss?" he pleaded. "We can make the next big town—"

"Furthermore," Pitt went on placidly, "it appears to me that the sheriff and his companion were interested in this lunch room! And that is why I suggested that we have lunch here!"

Dan gazed anxiously at the door. "But why wouldn't the sheriff come in, if he was interested—"

"Probably," said Pitt, "because he was waiting for someone else to come in first. It doesn't take much intelligence to reason that he was after someone, and that the someone he was after is someone who is sure to come in here to see someone else—perhaps the nice little girl who waited on us."

Dan shifted his gaze furtively to the waitress. "Hell," he muttered, "she don't look worried none. She's just looking at *you*."

"Probably," Pitt pointed out, "she doesn't know yet that there's anything to worry about. That sheriff, by the way, interested me. He's not a very pleasant person, Dan. He's short and stocky and he chews tobacco. He has a bony face and his eyes are mean and hard. He—"

The front door was flung open suddenly. A young man of perhaps twenty-two was hurrying in. His manner and movement were impetuously boyish, and there was a mischievous twinkle in his clear blue eyes. He barely glanced at Pitt and Dan, moved swiftly back toward the kitchen. In a moment he was holding the girl's hands.

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Pitt went on eating, thoughtfully. The girl and the young man were talking in low tones, happily, tenderly, after the fashion of sweethearts.

Dan spoke to Pitt in a hoarse whisper: "Here's one time you're wrong, boss. "*They* ain't in any trouble. But *we* might be if we don't get the hell away—"

AGAIN the door was thrust open. Two men plodded in, one ahead of the other. The man in the lead was short and stocky, and his bony face was set unpleasantly, although his eyes were bright as if he were about to find pleasure in doing something that would have been painful to a normal person.

The two men trudged straight through to the kitchen door. The tender whispering had abruptly stopped.

The sheriff made no attempt to keep his voice low: "Okay, Bob Gaime," he barked. "You can come along with us!"

The girl gave a little gasp.

"Go with you!" the boy said stoutly. "But I haven't done anything. What—"

The sheriff laughed harshly. "The evidence," he said, "says you have. You know about the school house robbery. Well, we got the dope on you. So come along!"

The girl's voice was raised in protest. "It isn't true! Bob is not a thief! You can't—"

"You shut up, Jean!" threatened the sheriff. "And if he don't come peaceable, he'll come with a busted head."

"And who's going to bust it?" stormed the boy. "I don't know anything about the robbery. And I won't—"

"Please, Bob," cut in the girl. "I—I don't want you hurt. You better go with the sheriff. We'll get you out somehow."

There was silence for a moment. "All right," the boy said then. "But I know this is a frame-up. You—"

"Come on," snapped the sheriff.

In a moment or two the two men walked out, the young man between them. There was silence in the lunch room. Dan peered at Pitt, who seemed intent on his lunch. Presently came the sound of gentle sobbing from the girl.

"We better get outer here," Dan urged in an undertone.

Pitt didn't seem to hear. In a little while he looked around, caught the girl's eye, motioned to her. She was dabbing at her eyes as she approached.

"W-what is it, sir?" she stammered.

Pitt looked at her gravely, noted the simple sincerity of her moist brown eyes. He arose, towering over her. He gave the impression, as always, of a travelling conqueror—but a very gracious one. He reached out a hand, took a chair from an adjoining table, and drew it close.

"Sit down, Jean," he said quietly.

"But I—I don't understand—"

"I want you to sit down, Jean, and tell me what's happened. You see, I may be able to help Bob," said Pitt.

He waited for her as she sat down, then resumed his own seat.

"I really don't know, sir," Jean said in a bewildered tone, "just why the sheriff took Bob—"

"You know about the robbery the sheriff mentioned?"

"Oh, yes. Everybody in town knows about that. It happened the night before last. There was a big carnival at the school house to raise money for the poor children of the county. They took in over a hundred

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dollars. The school principal, Mr. Skutter, put the money in the school safe, but when he got to the school the next morning the money was gone."

"A hunderd bucks!" Dan muttered disgustedly. "That ain't enough to do no one any good. What's the use fooling—"

"Quiet, Dan," cut in Pitt. He turned to the girl again. "Bob was at the carnival?"

"Yes, of course. Everybody was there. But Bob left before it was over. I remember he said good-by to me just outside the school house. He was going on a hunting trip, back into the hills. He got back just now."

"Ah!" murmured Pitt. "He went alone?"

"Yes. He always—"

"That, of course, makes it difficult. He probably won't have any alibi. And doubtless the sheriff has evidence."

"I don't care what evidence he has," cried the girl. "It just isn't true. The sheriff always had it in for Bob."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I guess it was because Bob was always up to mischief, so now he gets the blame for everything that happens. He—he was always getting into trouble. Nothing serious, just pranks. But he's kept out of trouble since he got out of school. He's been working on his mother's farm since then. He—he's good, Bob is."

The girl started to cry a little. Pitt spoke gently to her: "What sort of a man is the school principal?"

"Well, I don't like him," said the girl frankly. "He's kind of mean. I don't like him any better than I like Mr. Dillping."

Pitt raised an eyebrow. "And who is Mr. Dillping?"

"He's the chairman of the school board. He's got a lot of money, Mr. Dillping has—more than anyone in town. He has a general store, and the picture show, and a share in the bank, and—"

"Are Mr. Skutter and Mr. Dillping good friends?" inquired Pitt.

"Well, they used to be. But lately they hate each other—don't even speak. Everybody in town knows that."

"That," said Pitt, slowly, "may mean something. We must remember about Mr. Dillping." He got up. Dan, too, arose. "Don't worry too much, my dear," Pitt told Jean. "I'll see what I can do."

"Are you going to see Bob?"

"I'm going to see," said Pitt, "the sheriff."

II

DAN groaned audibly. He followed Pitt outside. Pitt spoke to Dan in a low voice. "I've got to see the sheriff. But he may not want to talk to me—without some kind of a build-up."

"A build-up?" Dan was puzzled.

"Yes. We must make the sheriff believe that I'm a great philanthropist—if you know what that means, Dan." He thought a moment. "*You* can do that, Dan."

"Me!" croaked Dan.

"That's right. You get in the limousine and drive over to the courthouse. You can see the building from here. I'll walk over there slowly. When you get there, you rush into the sheriff's office, as if very much upset. You tell him that you've lost me, and ask him if he's seen me. Then—"

"*Me* rush into the sheriff's office!" Dan said feebly.

"Of course. You rush in and, in your excitement, you let it slip about me being a very wealthy man from

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New York who is always giving away money. You use your own inimitable terminology, Dan, and I'm sure you'll be convincing. When the sheriff tells you that he hasn't seen me, you can look very unhappy and return to the limousine. About that time I'll arrive."

"But why fool with it at all?" argued Dan. "It don't amount to nothing—just a small-town job. And you might get spotted—"

"It may *look* small, Dan," Pitt reproved him, "but, to me, it would seem that young Bob Gaime is being framed. The job for which he is being framed is small, but the reason for his being framed is much larger."

"Okay. But how about dough? There's nothing for you in it."

"Money!" Pitt chided him. "Why talk about money? Bob's life might be ruined by this episode. Then there's the girl—a very worthy young lady, Dan. And I've no doubt that Bob's mother will be broken-hearted. Forget the money, Dan."

"Okay, okay," Dan said reluctantly.

He started the limousine, leaving Pitt on the sidewalk. Pitt watched the car sweep away. When it had rounded a corner, and was out of sight, Pitt started walking slowly. When he reached the corner nearest the courthouse, Dan was just emerging hurriedly from a door at the side. He saw Dan get in behind the wheel, then strode forward.

"All right, Dan?"

"Yeah," mumbled Dan. "I don't like the looks of that sheriff, so I didn't give him no chance to ask questions—"

"Quite right, Dan," approved Pitt. "I'll be out again soon."

Pitt vanished through the side door of the courthouse. He reappeared in about twenty minutes, rejoined Dan. He sat in the tonneau, silently meditative for a little while.

"They've got something of a case against Bob," he said presently. "And they're determined to build it up."

"Yeah?" growled Dan. "What's the dope?"

"Well, of course, to begin with, Bob has no alibi. Then, the safe was opened by someone who knew the combination. Bob knew it, because during his last year at school he acted as the principal's secretary—"

"Maybe he wasn't the only one," suggested Dan.

"According to the sheriff, he was the only one who knew it, who could possibly have done the job. The robbery was committed in the early hours of the morning by someone who knew the building well."

"How about the dough that was glommed?"

PITT'S eyes brightened. "A pertinent question, Dan. The stolen money has not yet been found. Naturally, finding the money under certain circumstances would cinch the case against Bob. And I'm greatly disposed to believe that that is the scheme."

"Well," Dan said gloomily, "I don't like the way that sheriff looked at me. Let's get outer this burg. Anyhow, there ain't no dough in sight, and you ain't got much left."

"A little over five hundred dollars."

"That's nothing," contended Dan. "You can give five hundred bucks away in five minutes."

"Giving, Dan, is our only excuse for living. Now, I wish you'd drive around to the other side of the courthouse."

Dan stared at him. "You—you ain't gonna go in there again?

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"A different department, Dan." Pitt smiled. "Courthouse records are quite fascinating. They reflect many a human tragedy. They picture many a—"

Dan started the limousine abruptly, drove around the building.

Pitt was inside the building for almost an hour. "The inside of a courthouse is interesting, Dan," he reported cheerfully. "Now, I found a record of two mortgages."

"Mortgages!" Dan muttered disgustedly.

"Yes, two of them. One of them was on a house here in town. It was for two thousand dollars, and is held by the bank. Also, it comes due in three days."

"Maybe the house belongs to this fellow that got pinched—"

"Not that one, Dan. But there *is* a mortgage on Bob's mother's farm. And that mortgage, Dan, is held by our good friend, Mr. Dillping, president of the school board, who is also the local political king."

"So what?" growled Dan.

"So now," announced Pitt, "we shall call upon Mr. Dillping. We will probably find him at his store, which is just a block or so down the street."

Glumly, Dan drove the limousine down the street, stopped in front of the general store.

Cases of goods were piled high in front of the windows.

"Dan," Pitt said thoughtfully, "do you think you could drive along the sidewalk in such a way as to wreck those cases without doing much damage to the limousine?"

"Why, I—I guess so, boss," said Dan, startled. "But what the—"

"Then wait exactly ten minutes, Dan, and do that. And when Mr. Dillping appears, keep him occupied in an argument for at least five minutes more."

DAN watched uneasily as Pitt's long legs took him across the sidewalk into the store. In a far corner, Pitt found a dingy office. In the office a man was sitting at a littered desk; a scrawny man with a cadaverous face and thin brownish hair that looked dusty.

Very courteously, Pitt introduced himself. "A small matter, this local robbery, Mr. Dillping," Pitt said smoothly. "Yet quite interesting. And the prompt apprehension of the culprit by your sheriff is very commendable." Pitt paused to touch a light to a cigarette. "However, it must be rather hard on the lad's mother."

Mr. Dillping wagged his head sorrowfully. "Very sad, sir. I'm deeply touched."

"No doubt," Pitt said softly. "Of course you know Bob's mother quite well?"

"Very well indeed," admitted Mr. Dillping. "She's a fine woman, Mr. Pitt. A brave little—"

"And this trouble of Bob's will cost money," Pitt mused. "It'll take money for a lawyer. Then, of course, Bob won't be able to work on the farm. By the way, do you happen to know if there's a mortgage on it, Mr. Dillping?"

"On the farm?" Mr. Dillping's voice squeaked a little. "Well, yes. I—well, unfortunately, I hold the mortgage myself." He shook his head again, very sadly. "You see, Bob and his mother needed money to carry them over to crop time. They might have got it at the bank, but, being very fond of them both, I offered to lend them the money personally—at a lower rate of interest."

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"Very kind of you," murmured Pitt. "Will they be able to raise any more money to take care of this new trouble?"

"I'm afraid not. This is a very poor community, Mr. Pitt. I'd be glad to do it myself, sir, if I only could." He sighed profoundly. "If I only could! But I'm a little short of cash now."

"And a shortage of cash," Pitt said sympathetically, "is very distressing—"

He was interrupted by a terrific crash that echoed through the store. Several woman customers screamed. A couple of clerks were running. Even Mr. Dillping looked startled. He got up quickly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Pitt," he said nervously. "I'll be back in a moment."

He hurried out through the store. But he was not back in a moment. And when, five minutes later, Pitt himself appeared outside, Mr. Dillping was on the sidewalk, arguing indignantly with Dan.

"Dan!" Pitt exclaimed in shocked tones. "How did you come to wreck Mr. Dillping's goods?"

Dan glared. "Why, I—well, it was like this, boss. I—"

"Never mind," cut in Pitt. He turned to Mr. Dillping. "This happens to be my car, Mr. Dillping, and my chauffeur. I'm terribly sorry about all this. Of course, I shall pay you for the damage. How much do you think it amounts to?"

"Well, I—it—I think it must be at least fifty dollars," Mr. Dillping said hopefully. "Maybe even seventy-five. I—"

"We'll make it an even hundred!" Pitt said graciously.

He took a roll of bills from his pocket. Dan groaned as he watched the money being transferred. Mr. Dillping was trying hard to smile as he took the money.

Pitt was never more agreeable. "With my apologies, good day to you, sir."

Mr. Dillping was murmuring a good-by as Dan and Pitt drove away.

"You'd better find a garage," Pitt told Dan. "The car acquired a few scratches and a dent or two. There's probably only one garage in town."

Dan headed the limousine down the street. "I don't like that Dillping guy," he grumbled.

"Neither do I," agreed Pitt. "He's a very sly old rascal."

"I don't see what the idea of busting around like that was, anyway," Dan went on. "Cost a hundred bucks, and you ain't got—"

"It was worth it, Dan. You see, it gave me a few minutes alone in Mr. Dillping's office, and I'm rather good at a quick search."

"Yeah?" Dan squinted at him suspiciously. "You find out something about his private doings?"

"NOT exactly. But perhaps there was something in his correspondence about his confidential activities in public affairs. And I also noticed an order on Mr. Dillping's desk."

"An order?"

"An order for merchandise, Dan, to be delivered to a certain place at a certain time, and held for a certain party."

"The interesting thing about this order, Dan, was that the merchandise was to be taken to Mr. Dillping's office for inspection before delivery. Now, that—by the way, Dan, there's the place where we had lunch. Let's stop here."

Dan stopped the limousine against the curb.

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Pitt spoke briskly. "We have a spare tire on the back of the car. Please take it off, Dan."

Dan looked groggy. "What the hell! We need that—"

"Let's not waste time, Dan."

Dan got out and sweated over the spare tire. When it was free, Pitt stood it on the sidewalk and looked at it. Then, without a word, he rolled it into the lunch room.

The waitress was still there, and the one customer in the place was just going out. The girl stared at Pitt, puzzled.

Pitt smiled at her. "We're doing what we can for Bob, my dear," he said. "And now I want you to do me a favor."

"I—I'll be glad to."

"Thank you. Here's a brand new tire. Within the next hour I want you to call the garage and offer to sell the tire to the proprietor."

Her eyes widened. "But I don't understand."

"It's very simple. You just tell him that you have a new 19 x 5 Bessing tire and that you'll sell it to him for five dollars. You won't need to tell him where you got it."

"Is—is it that kind of a tire?"

Pitt chuckled. "That isn't important. It's worth a lot more than five dollars. Here's five dollars for your trouble, and you can keep what the garage man gives you for the tire."

"Are you sure he will take it?"

"Perhaps not at first," said Pitt. "But give him time."

The girl suddenly smiled. "I'll do it," she said, "for you."

Pitt patted her lightly on the shoulder and returned to the limousine. In a few moments, Dan was driving into a ramshackle old garage building a block down the street. A man tinkering with an old car blinked up at them stupidly.

"Pitt stepped out of the limousine. "My man," he said to the garage man, "will tell you what he wants done while I use your telephone."

"Sure," grinned the man. "Phone's over there in the corner."

PITT found a small directory hanging to the instrument. He consulted it, then noted on a piece of paper the number of the garage and also the number of the Nelhi Public School. Presently he called the school, asked for Mr. Skutter, the principal. A high thin voice responded.

"Mr. Skutter," said Pitt, in his rich, imposing baritone, "this is Mr. Pitt—Mr. Paul C. Pitt, of New York."

Mr. Skutter seemed properly impressed. "Yes, sir."

"Since arriving here," Pitt went on sonorously, "I've been made acquainted with the deplorable incident of the night before last. It grieves me to learn that the poor children of the county have been deprived of the benevolence intended for them."

"Yes, sir," agreed Mr. Skutter. "It's pretty bad, sir. That rascally scamp who stole the money—"

"Exactly, Mr. Skutter," said Pitt. "Now, I am singularly fortunate in being able, at times, to help the unfortunate, and it occurred to me that I could do something in this case. When could I see you, Mr. Skutter? How about some time this evening?"

Mr. Skutter was silent a moment. "Well," he said slowly, "I'll be busy this evening—got to take a little drive. Probably leave the house by seven o'clock. I live right across the street from the school house, Mr. Pitt, and if you could call in between four and six—"

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"Thank you, Mr. Skutter," Pitt said warmly. "You may expect me—sometime."

He hung up, slipped the telephone notations into his pocket, returned to the limousine.

"This guy says it'll take quite awhile to fix the wagon in good shape," said Dan.

"Of course," said Pitt, agreeably. "And I'm delighted. Now we can spend a few hours simply resting and enjoying the simple beauties of this pleasant little town. Let's go for a stroll, Dan."

Dan shuddered. "But my feet get sore, boss. You know my feet get—"

"All right, Dan. You can wait here."

And for hours Paul C. Pitt strolled about in the shaded back streets of Nelhi.

He rejoined Dan for an early dinner. It was six-thirty when he leaned back with a sigh of content.

Dan looked at him anxiously. "What now, boss?"

"You go around to the garage and wait for me," said Pitt. "I have to call on Mr. Skutter."

"Well, anyhow," Dan said in a grateful tone, "you still got four hundred bucks left. It ain't much, but I was afraid maybe you would give it away."

"That," said Pitt, blandly, "is just what I intend to do."

Dan's face fell. "You—you're gonna—"

"It's for the poor children of Nelhi, Dan. And I certainly intend to see that they get it—before I leave town."

"But what the hell for?" gasped Dan. "What do *you* get out of it?"

"Not a thing, Dan. It's just an unencumbered impulse of mine." he got up. "But I have to make a phone call before I go to see Mr. Skutter."

"Who to?" said Dan.

"The sheriff," said Pitt.

III

IT was a little before seven, and dusk had settled, as Pitt approached a house across the street from the school house. The house was set back from the street, and there was a large tree close to the walk leading to the front door.

Pitt leaned comfortably against the tree and waited.

A light glimmered in a front room. Presently the light went out. The front door opened. A short, plump pompous little man stepped out and started down the walk. He had almost reached the tree when Pitt moved out in his path.

The man stopped with startled abruptness.

"I'm Paul C. Pitt," said Pitt, very politely. "I'm a little late, Mr. Skutter. I hope you didn't mind."

"Yes—ah—Mr. Pitt. I'm afraid I can't see you now. I recall distinctly telling you—"

"To call earlier? Yes," conceded Pitt. "But I won't take much of your time."

Mr. Skutter started forward again. "I'll see you tomorrow," he promised. "But tonight—"

"Just a very few minutes—now," urged Pitt. He grasped Mr. Skutter by the arm, swung him about, moved him back toward the door relentlessly, walking close to him. "A *very* few minutes."

Mr. Skutter was gasping, but seemed helpless. With his free hand, Pitt opened the door, ushered Mr. Skutter into his own house, swung to the left into a living room, reached up and switched on a light.

Mr. Skutter's fat face had paled. "This calls for an explanation, sir."

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"Of course. And you'll get it—quickly. Really," Pitt added pleasantly, "I should wring your neck!"

Mr. Skutter's second chin quivered. "W-what for?"

"For your part in the conspiracy against young Bob Gaime. I'll tell you at once what I know. You and Mr. Dillping are supposed to be enemies. I happen to know, sir, that that is just a pretense for the purpose of avoiding suspicion. You've been working together."

"But I—"

"*I'll* tell the story," Pitt went on rapidly. "Bob's mother has a farm, and it's a good one. Dillping, through his political connections, saw an excellent chance to make some big money by selling that farm to the government for the project it plans to start here—*if* he had the farm. So what did he do? Why, he first very kindly lent Bob's mother money—and took a mortgage on the farm.

"And Bob is a good worker, and there was a good chance that he would make enough out of his crops to pay off the mortgage when due. Dillping then conceived the idea that a sure way to make that impossible was to get Bob thrown into jail. So, with your help, he framed this school house job."

Mr. Skutter was quaking from head to foot. Pitt lit a cigarette.

Pitt looked up suddenly. "You've got that stolen money, Skutter!"

Mr. Skutter wobbled, and sat down quickly. "I—er—you—are you accusing me, sir, of—"

"You took it out of the safe yourself—if you ever put it in there. Bob was arrested. The one thing short of a good case against him was the absence of the money. You, Skutter, were just on the way out to plant the money. The sheriff, who is not on the inside with you and Dillping, would be tipped off. The money would be found where it would most incriminate Bob, probably on his farm." Pitt paused. "You, Skutter, have that money on you right now!"

"You're insane—"

"When I walked into the house with you, I felt quite a bulge against your side, inside your coat. Bring it out, Skutter!"

Mr. Skutter's face puffed out like a hot biscuit. "I—this is absurd, sir!"

Pitt smiled. "You refuse?"

"Certainly."

"Then," said Pitt amiably, "we'll wait."

"What?"

"Just wait," said Pitt.

HE sat down, too, just opposite Skutter. The school principal didn't seem to know what to make of it. He squirmed in his chair. Pitt drew casually on his cigarette. They sat quite silent for three or four minutes.

Then the telephone rang.

"Answer it," said Pitt.

Skutter hesitated, tottered to his feet, clutched the instrument. "Hello," he said weakly.

He listened intently. His eyes bulged. He turned his head to Pitt. "It's for you," he muttered, and put the telephone down.

Pitt nodded. "Did you recognize the voice?"

"The—the sheriff!"

"To be sure," said Pitt. He picked up the telephone. "Hello, sheriff," he said cordially. He listened. "Very good, sheriff," he said then. "In fifteen minutes. However, I think Mr. Skutter has something to say to you."

He put a hand over the mouthpiece.

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"What — what should I say?" whined Skutter.

"I think," said Pitt, "that you'll put yourself in the clear if you'll just tell the sheriff that you've found the school money—that it wasn't stolen at all, but just mislaid."

Skutter wagged his head miserably. "All right."

He took the telephone from Pitt, repeated the message to the sheriff, then hung up.

"Oh, just one thing more," said Pitt. He found a piece of paper in his pocket. "Call this number and tell the man you won't be around until tomorrow."

Skutter had gone into a partial collapse. "All right," he wheezed. "All right." He took the instrument again in his shaking fingers, carried out his instructions, and sank, moaning, into a chair.

Pitt carefully adjusted his hat. "Well, that will take care of Bob. His mother will be able to get a good price for that farm, too. And—with no thanks to you, Mr. Skutter—good-night!"

Without another look at the school principal, he turned and strolled from the house.

IN a few minutes he was at the garage. Dan was already in the limousine, grimly clutching the wheel.

"Geez, boss," said Dan. "I'm glad you come quick. That there sheriff showed up a minute ago. He's around here—"

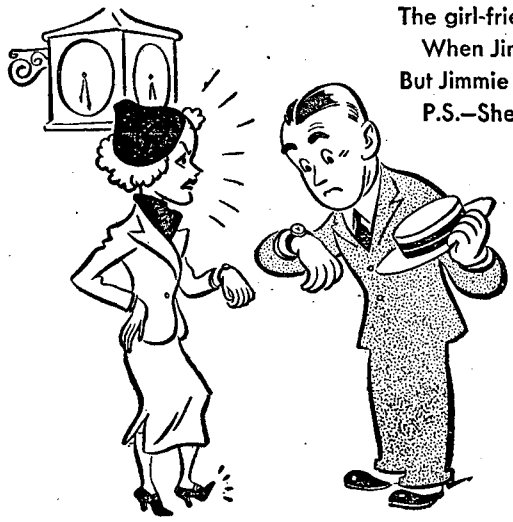
Footsteps plunked across the garage from a door at the back. The sheriff was trudging heavily toward the limousine. The garage man, sitting on a box, watched him as if fascinated. The sheriff's hard-bitten face seemed impassive as the dim light flickered on it.

"Ah, sheriff!" exclaimed Pitt, delightedly. "I see you got here!"

"Sure," said the sheriff. "I said I would, didn't I?"

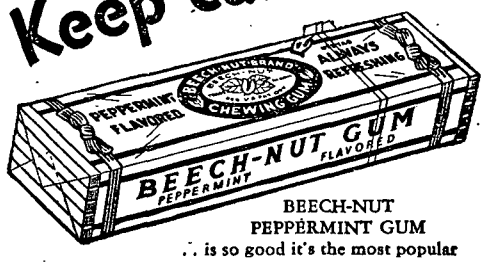
"Of course, you did." Pitt was fumbling in his pocket. "As I told you, sheriff, I was greatly concerned about the poor children of Nelhi, and I thought you would be the proper party to deal with."

The sheriff, perhaps with visions of



The girl-friend made an awful fuss
When Jimmie turned up late,
But Jimmie brought her Beech-Nut Gum . . .
P.S.—She kept the date!

Keep calm with



BEECH-NUT
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. . is so good it's the most popular flavor of any gum sold in the United States.

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having his picture in the local paper, actually grinned.

"Here it is," said Pitt. "Four hundred dollars for the children's fund!"

Dan was too stricken to even groan.

"Okay," said the sheriff. "I'll take care of it. That's all you want with me, Mr. Pitt?"

Calmly, the sheriff wheeled about and stomped out of the garage. For a moment there was dead silence.

"All the dough gone!" moaned Dan. "Five hundred bucks!"

The garage man had arisen and was touching Pitt's sleeve. "You owe me," he said, "seven dollars for the work—"

"Of course," said Pitt, and paid him.

"Five hundred bucks—*and* a spare tire!" muttered Dan.

"The spare tire!" repeated Pitt. "That's right." He glanced about the garage. There was a very small supply of tires hanging on the walls. Pitt went over to them, examined the tags, spoke to the garage man: "I'll buy this one!"

"That?" said the garage man. "Why, I—I can't sell you that one. It—"

"I'll give you twenty dollars for it!"

The garage man hesitated. Obviously, the temptation was too much. He took the tire down.

"Throw it into the tonneau," Pitt instructed. "We haven't time to fasten it on the back."

He counted the money in his hand—just thirteen dollars.

"Dan," said Pitt, "have you got seven dollars?"

Dan fished in his pockets, brought out the contents. "I got," he said painfully, "seven bucks and thirty cents."

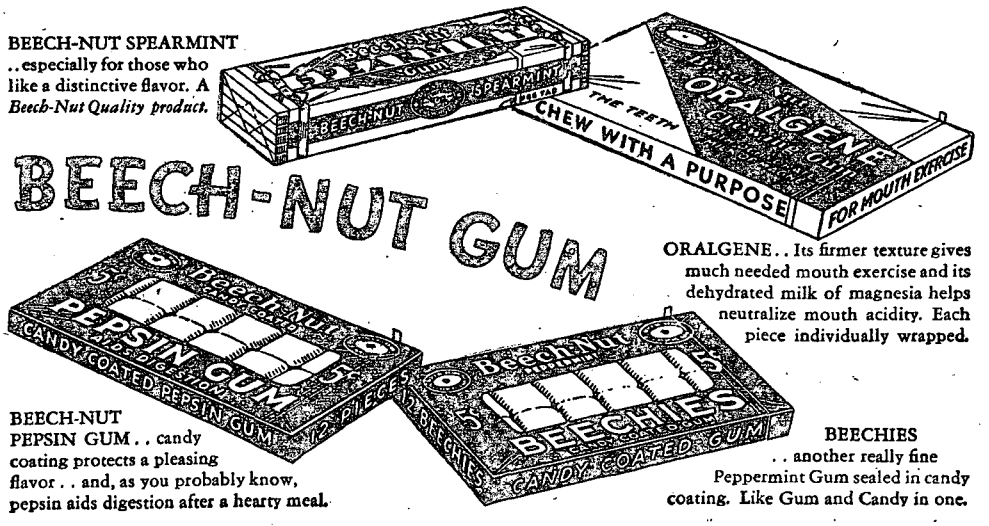
"You seem worried, Dan," said Pitt.

He reached over and took it, handed it with his own money to the garage man. Then he stepped into the tonneau.

"I guess that's all, Dan."

The limousine pushed out of the garage, swung down toward the highway. Dan's shoulders were hunched dejectedly.

"You seem worried, Dan," Pitt said presently.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FOR MOUTH EXERCISE
ORALGENE.. Its firmer texture gives much needed mouth exercise and its dehydrated milk of magnesia helps neutralize mouth acidity. Each piece individually wrapped.
BEECH-NUT PEPSIN GUM.. candy coating protects a pleasing flavor.. and, as you probably know, pepsin aids digestion after a hearty meal.
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"Five hundred bucks!" croaked Dan. "And that spare tire—why, it ain't even the one you left with the little dame. It ain't worth—"

"Of course not," admitted Pitt. "This one is the one that Mr. Dillping sold to Mr. Skutter."

"I don't get you," growled Dan.

"But it's so simple, Dan. Mr. Dillping and Mr. Skutter were putting on a little act of not having anything to do with each other. So, when Mr. Dillping sold the tire out of his store to Mr. Skutter, he sent it around to the garage for Mr. Skutter to pick up."

"Yeah, but it's still a cheap tire," snapped Dan.

"The garage man was holding this tire for Mr. Skutter to pick up this evening. To make sure that he would sell it to *me*, I first had the girl let the garage man know that she had a tire of this kind which she would sell him. And later I had Mr. Skutter phone him that he wouldn't be in for the tire until tomorrow. So the garage man knew that he could get the tire from the girl to replace this one. Of course, the tire the girl has is really different, but anyhow he can get his money—"

"But why all this stuff about a spare tire?"

Pitt chuckled indulgently. "Merely a desire to save Mr. Skutter from corruption, Dan. You see, his house is mortgaged for two thousand dollars. Of course Mr. Dillping knew that. And Mr. Skutter's part in the scheme was making it possible for Mr. Dillping to make several thousand dollars. Naturally, Mr. Dillping would be rewarding Mr. Skutter, but he needed a way of getting the money to him without actual contact." Pitt sighed a little. "Sorry to disappoint you, Dan. But I've just been exploring the inside of this tire. I should say that its actual value is about two thousand dollars!"

Cipher Solvers' Club for July

(*Continued from Page 61*)

Ten—Cub, Chicago, Ill.; Electron II, Paterson, N. J.; Jaleco, Los Angeles, Calif.; Amnyi Machen, Indianapolis, Ind.; Jerry Phelan, Bronx, N. Y.; *Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Nine—Mrs. Bertram Craven, Rensselaer, N. Y.; Mrs. Patricia Hall, Lagrange, Tex.; E. Sthar Odilnu, Atchison, Kans.; Carl H. W. Oestreich, Grants Pass, Oreg.; Loula Williams, Stockton, Calif.

Seven—Chi Valor, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Six—Akaby, Detroit, Mich.; Flim Bates, Canton, Ohio; Edna D. Brooks, Attleboro, Mass.; Mrs. George E. Curtis, Gulfport, Miss.; J. B. Emerick, Fort Monroe, Va.; Esperanto, Washington, D. C.; Iflac, San Francisco, Calif.; *Kriptobens, Hope, N. Mex.; Mahdi, Merrillan, Wis.; Mossback, Randle, Wash.; Neon, Rochester, N. Y.; Harold W. Pickard, San Diego, Calif.; Sachem, Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Alvin Schisler, Croton-on-Hudson, N. Y.; Joseph M. Schneider, New York, N. Y.; Logan Simard, Pasadena, Calif.; Superior, Superior, Wis.; F. W. Thomas, High Springs, Fla.; A. Traveller, Washington, D. C.; Waltraw, Detroit, Mich.

Five—Duke d'Ekud, Bronx, N. Y.; G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo.; Sherlock Holmes II, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Donald Houghtalin, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Al. Liston, Newark, N. J.; Segro, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Grace C. Shaw, Milwaukee, Wis.; Mrs. B. C. Squires, Thomaston, Conn.; J. Toscano, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Four—Alice E. Bareerbo, Chicago, Ill.; Bernard G. Bernaski, Hartford, Conn.; Philip Chiesa, Union City, N. J.; Epehaw, Long Island City, N. Y.; William E. Gilbert, Alexandria, Va.; William Nelson, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Three—Stephen Barabas, New York, N. Y.; Hannah Epstein, Brooklyn, N. Y.; David Martin Lieberman, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Two—A. E. Balinsky, Baltimore, Md.; Goldie Elliott, Guthrie, Okla.; Sydney Grablowski, Newark, N. J.; Richard Hendrickson, Bronx, N. Y.; Irving Wooley, New York, N. Y.

One—David Mueller, Cape Girardeau, Mo.; Robert L. Pease, Toledo, Ohio.

Unsigned—Five answers, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Corrections—A. Onyx Starkes, St. Louis, Mo., 24 answers for June instead of 18; Elvin Crane Paynter, Ocean City, N. J., 17 answers for June not previously credited; Kappa Kappa, Seattle, Wash., 10 answers for June instead of 5; Nedyah, New York, N. Y., 30 answers for May instead of 23; Bernice Wallas, Chicago, Ill., 3 answers for May not previously credited.

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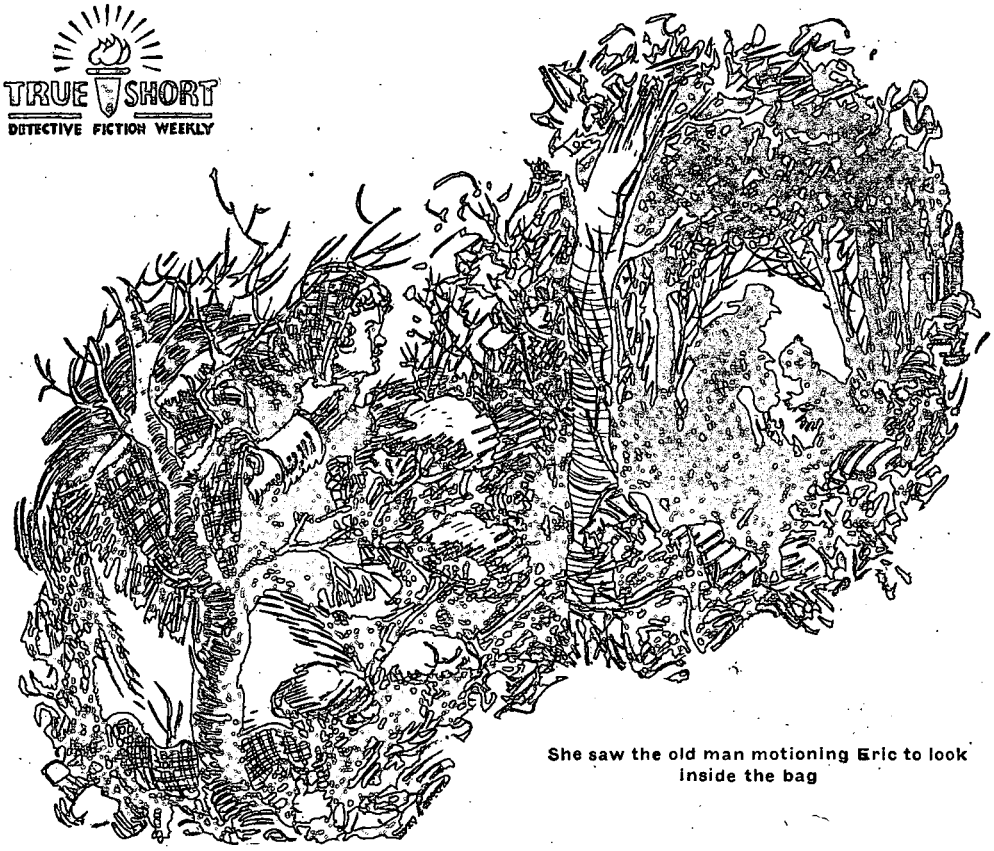
TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



She saw the old man motioning Eric to look inside the bag

The Ogre of Mecklenburg

By Dugal O'Liam

MECKLENBURG is a peaceful, agrarian state in Germany where, save for the city of Berlin itself, violence seldom enters the daily scheme of life and neighbors trust neighbors and no man has anything to fear from his fellow men.

Like Bavaria, it is a state of friendliness and good will where the husbandman drinks his beer and plays his skeet and pinochle and the housewife bakes her sweet bread and pumpernickel and cooks her saurbraten and raises her children and dwells in peace with those about.

Perfect Murder! — So Craftily Perfect That the Police of the Entire German Nation Suspected Nothing — Until It Was Almost Too Late

Murderers are few and far between in Mecklenburg because justice is swift, or is supposed to be swift, and there are few hours when either jealousy, or greed or

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vengeance enter into the peaceful and contented lives of the men and women who live there.

There are quiet woods in Mecklenburg and green fields and spawning creeks and it has been the habit of generation upon generation of children to play in these woods. Their's was the security that comes from good will and good neighbors and honest men all about them who have children of their own and love and protect and look out for the children of their neighbors and of perfect strangers, too. It's part of the Mecklenburg credo.

It was back in 1933, on an April night when winter was not wholly dispelled from Mecklenburg that Gust Gnick of the little town of Wittenberge, northwest of Berlin, reported to the police there that his nine-year-old son, Kurt, had gone out to play in the woods bordering the town and had not come back.

Because it was a raw day and the cold still gripped the woods about the little town, the police sent out men to search for little Kurt. They searched the woods and they hunted in the alleys and the narrow side streets of the town. They searched all night and all the next day, but Kurt Gnick was nowhere to be found. The police believed he had wandered away and possibly gotten lost and, in fright, had been unable to tell his name, but none, not even the officers or Gust Gnick, felt that any more serious harm had befallen him.

Two days passed and more children went to play in the woods around Wittenberge. They were young children, as Kurt had been, playmates of his and none thought ill of their going on with their play as they had before. There were no kidnaping scares in peaceful Mecklenburg, probably because the home-loving Germans never thought of that most despicable of all means to raise money.

It was toward evening when a group of children ran into the Gnick garden and told Gust Gnick that they had found Kurt. He was in the woods, they said, sound asleep, but they couldn't wake him up. He was all right, they said, because there was no sign of his having been injured. He simply was asleep and, try as they would, they couldn't get him to answer their calls.

Gust Gnick ran with them back to the place on the edge of the town where the woods came down and make friendly contact with the outlying houses where they had seen Kurt asleep. But Kurt was not asleep. He was dead, but there was no sign of violence about him. His coat was neatly buttoned about his small form, his pockets were undisturbed, there were no bruises or cuts or signs of bullets.

They carried the tiny body to the Gnick home and a doctor was called. He came and examined the boy and after his examination, he pronounced the cause of death as fatigue and exposure. "He must have been playing hard, running and jumping and tiring himself," the doctor explained, "and then he lay down to rest and fell asleep and the chill was more than his childish constitution could stand."

THEY buried little Kurt Gnick and mothers warned their children not to overexert themselves in the woods and not to fall asleep, whatever they did, when it was cold and the night was coming on. But there was no thought of forbidding the forests to their children and the youngsters of Wittenberge continued to romp among the trees and under-

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brush and so did all the children of Mecklenburg and all Germany, too, for that matter. And why not? Wasn't there peace and contentment and an alert police force and hadn't Mecklenburg always been safe and quiet and restful?

It was three months later and the scene was the outskirts of the city of Potsdam where the German Royal Family had its summer palace. Potsdam is a little south and a little west of Berlin and many kilometers southwest of Wittenberge and it is doubtful if the quiet people there had even heard of the strange fate of little Kurt Gnick up the Rhone.

On a July night eleven-year old Wolfgang Metzdorf, who lived with his mother and father on the edge of the town, disappeared. The police also were told of his disappearance and they searched for him for many, many days. It was a quiet search and there was no alarm in the countryside, not even when two weeks passed and there was no sign of Wolfgang Metzdorf.

Then one day toward the end of July, some children were playing in the forests nineteen miles south of Potsdam when they came upon a tiny body. They ran for help and when the police came they discovered that it was the body of Wolfgang Metzdorf—because he carried a tiny harmonica in his pocket and the harmonica was not disturbed. Neither was his clothing disturbed in any way and he lay as if in a peaceful sleep.

A doctor came to see the body of Wolfgang and again the verdict was that he had died from exposure. This time the doctor said that hunger also had seized him, that he probably had become lost and had become so famished that he no longer had strength to walk on and had dropped off to sleep and died in his sleep. But the doctor lost sight of the fact that hunger is a gnawing and painful thing to a small boy and that there was a benignant peace on Wolfgang's face.

Three and a half months passed and there were no more strange disappearances of children. Mecklenburg was peaceful and the children went about their play with no more disaster until November came and with it came tragedy to the town of Ludwigslust in the central part of Mecklenburg, a few kilometers north of Wittenberge. Here let us not confuse Wittenberge, where Kurt Gnick met his death, with the town of Wittenberg, a larger city southwest of Berlin which also is to figure in our story.

IT was on the night of November 2, 1933, that Ernest Tesdorf, ten-year old son of a small merchant, failed to return to his Ludwigslust home. At first there was little alarm, because Ernest knew the woods well. He had learned them as a tiny boy when he had hunted with his father and helped him gather kindling and he had visited them every day since and knew every by-path and every tree. That Ernest could become lost in the woods about Ludwigslust was impossible and the police pondered that and were bewildered.

Seventeen days passed before a peasant stopped his wagon on the way into Ludwigslust because he had been attracted by some bright color on the edge of the woods. He kicked a pile of earth and leaves and branches and the earth fell away and revealed the red of Ernest Tesdorf's coat. He had been partly buried under drifting leaves and branches and the dirt had caught in the branches, but, as with Kurt and Wolgang, there were no

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signs of violence. Only an expression of contented sleep.

For some unexplained reason the police were not overly impressed. They thought it strange that a boy who knew the woods as well as Ernest should get lost so close to their edge, but the doctor said the boy had died of exposure, which had developed a pneumonia condition in his lungs and the police were satisfied with that and even the elder Tesdorf grieved, but suspected no foul play.

II

NOW the tragedies began to occur in staggering succession. Three days after the body of Wolfgang was found and identified, eight-year old Alfred Prætorius disappeared from his home in Rostock, far up on the frozen edges of the Baltic sea, in the extreme northern part of Mecklenburg. Weeks passed and the police sought him and then came the day when they found him, beneath drifts of snow, in the timbered marshlands outside Rostock.

He, too, appeared to have fallen asleep. His great-coat was pulled closely around his neck and shoulders, his gloves were on, his heavy overshoes were untouched, he was bundled up as if he'd dropped off to sleep and there was no sign of suffering in his peaceful face. Nor were there any signs of violence and a doctor came and looked at the stiff little body and said that he had died of hunger and exposure.

Less than a month passed before police were seeking Hans Korn of Leubeck, who had disappeared from his home one day when he had started toward the forests on the edge of the little town half way between Rostock and Kiel, Germany's greatest northern seaport. The hunt went on for Hans for many weeks, too, and finally his body was found, no traces of violence to be seen anywhere on it, the clothing in perfect order, the face serene in a peaceful last sleep.

It seems incredible that the German police were unable to link the deaths of these boys, all in precisely the same manner and all of approximately the same age, into some definite criminal pattern, but they did not. Perhaps it was the absence of any suggestion of motive that tricked them into their indolence. After all, there had been no indications of robbery, no signs of kidnaping, no hint that these children had been the victims of some emotionally unsound fiend.

Some time elapsed before the deaths broke out again, but when they did the casualty list was even more terrible. During the month of October, in the succeeding fall, four boys disappeared from their homes in various parts of the province of Mecklenburg and ultimately all were found in some wooded area, lying as if in peaceful sleep, no marks of violence upon them.

Capping the climax of this manifestation was the discovery of the bodies of eight-year old Arthur Dill and five-year old Edgar Dittrich lying side by side in a thicket outside the village of Neuruppin. But theirs was not the serene death of the others. In their half open mouths were fragments of poison mushrooms and the police took a doctor to look upon them and accepted the explanation of their deaths —from eating poison mushrooms.

Suddenly, there came, out of the tragedy of Neuruppin, a fragile clew. An insurance salesman went to the police and said that he had seen the Dill child walking along an open road toward the woods with an elderly man.

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The child appeared to be sleepy, the salesman said, and the man appeared to be helping him. Momentarily the police were alert, but they soon found a flaw in the salesman's story. The boys had been found together, hadn't they? Then they must have gone to their deaths together. The police, satisfied with their acumen, lapsed back into inertia and the insurance salesman went on his chagrined way.

THE indifference of the police can scarcely be understood in America. Or even in England, or in France, where the Sûreté would have been beating the countryside every hour of the day. But in that section of Germany which knew no touch of the war and where peace reigns so soundly news travels on sluggish feet and none of these communities were able, by newspapers or word of mouth, to link their little tragedies with those of other towns.

In fact, they scarcely knew that any children had been disappearing in other towns, German newspapers being loath to regard such happenings as avidly as we in America.

Things have a strangely unrelated consequence in Mecklenburg. Although more than half a dozen children had died within a year and all had died under similar circumstances, there had been no autopsies in any of the deaths. Nor had they been compared and other towns warned and parents told to keep their children out of the woods and under close watch. Yet all of the deaths had occurred in an area little larger that the state of New Jersey and a thickly settled area, too.

So it was that when, on December 22, a few weeks after the double tragedy of Neuruppin, a sinister figure came into the picture, the police scarcely were ready for action. Young Eric Foegler, twelve-years old, was looking in a knick-knack store in Techentin, a few miles outside Ludwigslust—where Ernest Tesdorf went into the woods and died—when a gray old gentleman, heavy paunched and flabby jowled, with a kindly look in his watery eyes, sidled up to him.

"Something you want in there, sonny?" the old man said. The boy said he wanted a fountain pen to use in his school work, but that he didn't have the money to buy it.

The old man's face beamed upon him. "Such a modest wish," he said, patting the boy's head gently. "But those are not good enough pens for you. Tomorrow I shall get you an excellent pen, one worthy of a good boy like you. Meet me after your school outside the park and I shall have it for you and three marks as well for your modesty."

Before he left the old man took Eric's hand. "You must say nothing to anybody about this," he said, "or I shall have dozens of small boys wanting me to buy them pens. Promise?"

Eric promised. That night he was excited and ill at ease at home. Frau Foegler noticed his strange behavior and questioned him. The boy could not contain his excitement wholly. What boy could? "It's something I'm getting tomorrow," he fenced. "A nice old man's giving it to me—but I can't say what it is. I promised I wouldn't say even this much."

"When's he giving it to you?" the mother wanted to know.

"I'll meet him after school—and I'll come right straight home and show it to you," Eric promised. The mother was appeased. After all, the boy had a right to accept a gift that pleased him. And if he'd earned it by his

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brightness and his good behavior, then that was the more credit to her for having raised him so well. She was even a little proud as she went about her evening chores. That Eric was a good boy, indeed.

On the next day, after Eric had gone to school, the mother began to worry. She had heard, vaguely, of the two deaths at Neuruppin and she had heard that a man had told the police that an elderly man had been seen with one of the victims. The more she pondered the thing, the more she put two and two together and the more fearful she became. So when the hour approached for school to be dismissed, she put her shawl over her head and her heavy coat about her and her overshoes over her house shoes and hurried to the school.

As she approached the school she could see the children leaving. She hurried her steps. She searched the faces for her son. The last children came out, Eric was not among them. Some of the youngsters tarried at the school yard. She questioned them. Had they seen Eric? No, Frau Foegler. Have you seen my Eric? No, Frau Foegler. Hysterically she she questioned child after child. The same response.

THEN a boy came in from the street. Had he seen Eric Foegler? Yes, he'd seen Eric. Eric had come out earlier and had met a kindly old man in front of the building. The old man had a present for him, Eric had said. They were going for a walk. The old man wanted to talk with him. They had gone done the road, toward the woods a few meters away. The old man carried a bag of some kind, like a knapsack, but he wasn't a soldier.

Frenziedly Frau Foegler ran toward the woods. Two of the larger boys followed her. They reached the trees and searched along the edge of the grove. They saw no one. Then they plunged in, along a path the children often took. A short distance in the woods they heard voices.

One was Eric's, exclaiming in rapture over something. The other was a gentle old voice. "And I have other interesting things for you," he was saying. The mother saw him opening the grip he carried, motioning Eric to look inside. She ran toward them.

Eric saw her and held up a new fountain pen. The old man saw her and his jaw dropped. Frau Foegler was screaming in her hysteria, "What are you doing, you old villain? What do you mean by molesting my boy?" The old man closed his grip quickly, snatched at the fountain pen in Eric's hand, missed and then fled into the woods.

The boy, Eric, was astounded at his mother's hysteria. He remonstrated with her. The kindly old man had given him the fountain pen and had showed him a veritable treasure trove in the knapsack. He hadn't meant any harm. The boy's eyes were becoming dull. The mother noted a sudden drowsiness. For a moment, Eric appeared about to fall, then he breathed deeply and was himself again.

Frau Foegler reported the incident to the police. They were instantly active. They notified other towns in Mecklenburg to watch for the old man. They ordered children to eschew all strangers and to stay out of the woods. And then they did what they should have done a great many months before. They notified the national police in Berlin of what had happened and reminded them of the deaths of Neuruppin.

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Two Reich detectives, Hans Lobbes and Walter Sauer, were called into the commander's office. They were told of the Foegler incident, of the deaths in Neuruppin, of the story of the insurance man of Neuruppin that he had seen one of the boys with an elderly man.

"There is no trace of violence," they were told, "but these deaths have become too frequent, these deaths from exposure. Trace this old man."

STILL the police were too dilatory. Before Lobbes and Sauer could untrack themselves from the mire of inadequate information, the strange death had struck twice more. Hans Neumann, eleven, of Wismar, halfway between Rostock and Leubeck on the south shore of the Baltic, had been found, apparently a victim of exposure in the edge of a small grove and a few days later Hanz Zimmerman, nine, disappeared and his body was found three months later within a few feet of the spot where Hans Neumann's body had been discovered.

He, too, appeared to have fallen asleep and died from exposure and hunger. There were no signs of violence anywhere on the body, but he had last been seen by one of his playmates walking along the road toward the woods with an elderly man who carried a bag over his shoulder like a knapsack.

Now Lobbes and Sauer picked up the trail again. They began to check over the deaths, from that of little Kurt Gnick down to this latest double tragedy. There must be, somewhere behind it all, a motive. The usual motive associated with such crimes was entirely missing. The children had not been subjected to any form of attack. They simply seemed to have gone to sleep, peacefully and quietly, and then died.

Lobbes discovered that it was the custom of the parents of school children to give the youngsters small coins with which they could purchase food at school. During the summer the children also had coins, pennies and their equivalent and sometimes slightly more, for spending money. Now and then it was found that the slain children had larger sums, but all of them comparatively trivial.

Lobbes and Sauer discovered that the coins always had been missing from the bodies.

In the midst of these investigations, a new clue came to the detectives. A boy named Edgar, whose last name has been forever withheld, was approached by a kindly old man in Lenzen on the Elbe. The boy went with the old man to a motion picture performance. The old man's behavior was exemplary. He had been thoughtful and instructive. The boy arranged to meet him the next day.

"We'll walk in the woods," the old man told Edgar. "There are things I will tell you about the birds and the plants that you may never have known."

A short distance in the woods the old man opened a knapsack he carried. He invited Edgar to look upon the treasures inside. There was a small camera, a hack saw, a magnifying glass, many watches, various springs and cogged wheels and tiny screws. There were knives and fountain pens and mirrors and tiny, magnetized horseshoes to which the minute screws and caps clung in yellow clusters.

As Edgar looked, he became drowsy. He tried to shake it off, the better to explore this treasure trove. The old man had told him he could

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have any article he wished. He sat smilingly to one side as Edgar searched through the bag. The feeling of drowsiness became more compelling. The boy soon was no longer able to shake it off and he dropped back on the soft grass beneath a thicket and went to sleep.

IT so happened that Edgar was fourteen years old and a strong, robust outdoors boy. He was stronger than the others who had fallen before this strange killer because he was older. He slept for many hours and when he awakened he was cold and hungry and all alone. The old man had gone and taken with him his knapsack of treasures. Not one of the trinkets Edgar had selected for himself remained.

Edgar had had a knife, a patent pencil and two marks in small pieces in his pocket. They were gone, too.

He leaped to his feet and ran into the town. He told his father of his adventure. The father told the police. The police summoned Lobbes and Sauer. They arrived from Wismar a few hours later and took Edgar to the town hall.

He had watches and a sort of magnifying glass with a black frame around it in the bag," Edgar said. "There were all kinds of watch and clock parts, too."

The detectives checked that. Then Edgar told them of his falling asleep.

"Did you notice any strange odor about the bag?" Sauer asked him.

"Yes, I did. It had a sort of sweet odor to it, a kind of a sickening odor."

"Chloroform," Sauer told Lobbes. "Now we want one type of man—an itinerant watch and clock repairman. We'll call Berlin."

They called Berlin. They asked that the records be checked for any convictions, on any charge, of an itinerant watch and clock repairer. Particularly in the Mecklenburg district. If such a record was found, it was to be sent at once to Lenzen. They would await it there.

There was such a record. It concerned the career of Adolph Seefield, a native of Potsdam, a kindly, benign old man now somewhere around sixty-five whose record was spotted with convictions and prison sentences for petty crimes, mostly small burglaries. Once he had been accused of murdering a fourteen-year old boy in a suburb of Berlin. He was acquitted. Again he had been accused of another crime of a similar nature. Again he had been acquitted.

Then had come a jail term after he had terrorized several communities by pursuing children with a long knife and threatening to kill them. When he was convicted he admitted he had pursued the youngsters, both boys and girls. "Children always brought me trouble, they picked on me and they caused me to be arrested for things I didn't do," he said. "I hate them and want to get even."

III

NOW Lobbes and Sauer were convinced that they had their man. They broadcast an order to pick up Adolph Seefield, wherever he might be seen. He was a conspicuous enough figure in the smaller towns of Mecklenburg. Almost everyone knew him as Uncle Tick Tock.

But finding him was not so easy. The hunt went on for weeks. He would be seen here, there and everywhere, but he seemed to drop out of sight before the police could catch up with him.

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Then the ogre struck again, under the very eyes of Lobbes and Sauer. It happened in Wittenberg, which is not to be confused with Wittenberge, as has been pointed out before. The child was eight-year-old Gustav Thomas. He disappeared after school and was found in the woods near the schoolhouse the following day, his face calm and peaceful, as if he had fallen asleep. But he was dead as all the others save only Edgar of Lenzen had been dead.

Immediately Lobbes and Sauer hurried to Wittenberg. The boy had been found the day after his disappearance. The man would have little opportunity to go far. He was known to travel on foot by choice and now that he must have known the search that was going on for him, he would not dare risk begging a ride or taking a train or bus.

It was less than twelve hours after Gustav Thomas had disappeared that Lobbes and Sauer reached Wittenberg. They had no sooner learned that the boy's lungs showed signs of his having inhaled chloroform than they had a call from the tiny town of Wutzetz, near Berlin, far removed from Wittenburg, somewhere around a hundred and twenty miles as we reckon distance in the United States.

Uncle Tick Tock had been seen in that vicinity early on the morning after Gustav Thomas's disappearance.

Lobbes and Sauer were flabbergasted. It would have been impossible for the man to travel so far without taking a train or a bus. Even the buses didn't often make such amazing time. And every train and bus was being watched carefully.

Still they rushed to Wutzetz. They combed the town, searched the countryside. There was no sign of Uncle Tick Tock. They began to hear of him in other places. He had been seen again in Potsdam. The officers went there. He was gone. He had been in Hamburg. The Hamburg police, large and well organized, could not trace him. Then he had been in Hanover, far to the southwest, but no trace of him was picked up there. Word came that he had appeared on the outskirts of Berlin again.

The national police and the locals combed Berlin from top to bottom. No Seefield. But the killings had stopped. There were no more reports of them. Undoubtedly Uncle Tick Tock was fleeing too fast to stop for another killing

March wore into April and finally there came word that this macabre phantom of a man had been seen near Wutzetz again. The detectives went to Wutzetz from Berlin. They began a systematic combing of the town and then fanned out into the countryside. They approached a farmhouse, knocked on the door. A fat and amiable farmer opened the door.

"We're looking for an *itinerant* watch peddler, a man named Seefield," Lobbes announced. "Have you seen him—"

He hadn't finished his sentence when a ruddy faced old man, thick set and mild eyed, with small, well formed hands and neat clothing came to the door, hallooing, "I'm Adolph Seefield —I'm a watch repairer."

THE detectives seized the man at once. The old man looked at them in amazement. He jerked his sturdy arms loose and drew himself up to his full height, confronting them.

"What's the meaning of this? If you have business with me, state it." His tones were heavy with hurt dignity.

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"You're wanted for murder," Sauer told him. "Get ready to come along with us."

The old man stared, then laughed. "It must be a joke of some kind. I haven't harmed anyone."

"You've got a prison record—" Lobbes again couldn't finish.

"Granted, but not for murder," Uncle Tick Tock said. "I've served my time. Now I want to go about my work as a peaceable citizen."

Sauer spotted the knapsack. He took it out onto the stoop and opened it. The odor of chloroform swept out upon him. He allowed it to stand open for several minutes. Then he took out the contents, all the things Edgar had described plus a dozen or so children's handkerchiefs, a knife and pencil taken from Edward, knick-knacks taken from some of his other victims and not yet sold.

There was, in addition, a note book. It contained all the stops the itinerant repairman had made.

"I notice you keep a pretty strict account of where you've been," Sauer said.

"Yes, that's my practice," Seefield agreed.

"But you fail to make note of having been in Wittenberge on April 16, 1933. A boy named Kurt Gnick was killed there on that day."

"Do you think that makes me the murderer?" Seefield said, contemptuously.

"And there's an entry saying you were in Moenschagen on November 21, 1933," Sauer went on, ignoring the defense, "but I note that it has been tampered with and that the original entry said Rostock. A boy named Alfred Praetorius was slain there on that day."

Seefield smiled wanly, then sat down facing the detectives. "Yes," he said, "I did it and I'm ready to pay. I did it because children kept mocking me and getting me into trouble. I hated them. But I couldn't kill them with knives or clubs. That was too easy to trace. So I put chloroform in my bag and when they looked in at the things, they keeled over. Then I gave them a good long sniff out of a bottle and they were dead."

It was on May 22 of this year that Seefield was led to the headsman's block in Scherwin in Mecklenburg. He smiled in grim satisfaction as they laid his head in the crevice.

"Well, there's fourteen of them won't bother any old men any more," he said and the ax fell.

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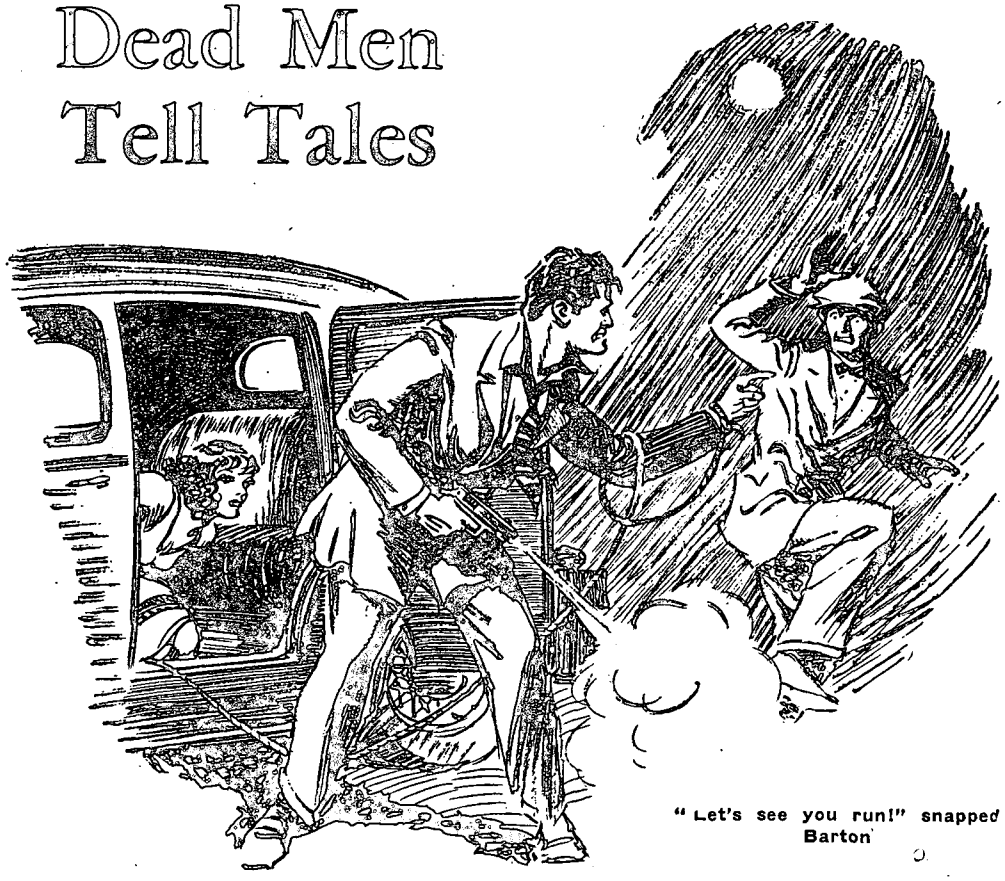
Dead Men Tell Tales



"Let's see you run!" snapped Barton

By Fred MacIsaac

What has happened—

STEPHEN STEELE and Private Detective Tim Cody had been roommates and close friends back at old Eli Evans School in Providence, so that when they met in New York after a lapse of years, the two young men decided that it would be a good idea to have a reunion and talk over old times.

Steve, who is the wealthy grandson of old Jonathan Steele, multi-millionaire owner of the Steele Motor Company, takes Steve to meet the glamorous Rhoda Robinson, an actress whom he had met a short while previously on the boat coming from Europe. Rhoda and Steve are devoted to each other, and Steve decides to fly to California to tell his irascible old grandfather of his engagement to Rhoda. He leaves Newark Airport — entrusting Rhoda to Tim.

When Dick Barton Trapped Gangster Maroni He Called It a Lucky Break — He Should Have Called It "A Rash Attempt at Suicide"

A few days later the newspapers announce in screaming headlines that Jonathan Steele's grandson has been murdered. Tim and Rhoda are broken up over the news of his death—which, accord-

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for September 5

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ing to the newspaper accounts, had happened amid unsavory surroundings in the Los Angeles Negro section. Rhoda wishes to attend the funeral, but the Steele family, believing that she is an adventuress, denies her the privilege. Tim has a hunch that the whole case is phony, and decides to spend the legacy of ten thousand dollars which Steve had willed him in finding out the truth. He suspects that Steve is still alive, and so he flies to Los Angeles to investigate.

On arriving in Los Angeles, Tim is met by two city detectives. Having had a "tip" that he is a tough guy from New York, they tell him they have orders to run him out of town. Tim phones Richard Barton, an attorney, a relative of Steve Steele's personal lawyer, for legal help. He comes immediately to Tim's hotel and puts the squeeze on the two flatfeet, who apologize to Tim. Barton learns from them that it was a Mr. Rogers, of the Steele Company who had given the orders.

Barton listens to Tim's ideas about the murder, and Barton, on the spur of the moment, decides that they should make a call on old Jonathan in Santa Barbara. He phoned his sister, Clarice, a charming and witty girl, to pick them up in her car and drive them out.

After an hour of furious driving, they arrive at the Steele estate, scale the surrounding wall, and are just about to enter the mansion when they are met by strong-arm guards who break up their little party. During the scuffle, Tim thinks he sees the face of Steve at one of the upper windows. By overpowering the gatekeeper they manage to leave the estate unapprehended, and return to Los Angeles.

Barton tells Tim that even if Steve is alive, they still have a huge fight on their hands, for Steve is now legally dead. Barton phones Parker B. Blake of the Steele Corporation, who requests that Tim have a talk with Lafe Morton, the personal representative of Patterson, President of the Steele Corporation.

Acting for Mr. Patterson, Lafe Morton, alias Giovanni Maroni, advises Tim to give up his activities in the Steele case for fifty thousand dollars—or else! Tim flatly refuses. Later, from a surprising source—the chance remark of a hotel bellboy—Tim learns that the man who, for a time, was Steve's impostor, had a missing finger joint on one hand, and that it had been shot off in a gambling joint in Las Vegas, near Boulder Dam, Colorado. Tim makes a quick trip to Las Vegas for an investigation, and discovers that the impostor's name is Ambrose J. Adamson of St. Louis, whose body must have been substituted for Steve's at the funeral.

On returning to Los Angeles, Tim tries to get in touch with Barton, who has been shot by an unknown assailant. Convalescing at the Emergency Hospital, visitors are denied to him. Later, Tim has a conversation at his hotel with Mr. Patterson, loses his temper and blurts out that he knows Steve is stil alive. Soon after, Tim is picked up by gangsters in Patterson's pay, brought to a cheap hide-out, where it looks as if he is going to get the heat.

Maroni orders his henchmen to take Tim safely to Chicago, where he is to be killed. They leave Los Angeles and head across the desert where they run into a blizzard. Tim manages to escape during the confusion of the storm, and is nearly frozen when he passes out.

In the meantime, Barton, the lawyer, has recovered from his wound. He uses Clarice to lure Maroni to a private dining room, and with assumed righteous indignation, breaks in upon them and forces Maroni to go to the Barton home where the gangster receives a good beating. Soon after, Maroni's pals, having trailed him, break in on the Bartons, and the tables are turned.

CHAPTER XVII

Tables Turned

MARONI frisked me and relieved me of the weapon I had taken from him at the restaurant. He hefted it and thrust it back into his shoulder holster.

"Take the big sedan in the garage," he commanded. "I'll drive to the hotel in your car. I've got something important on or I'd go along with you. Jake, take a look out. Some nosy cop might have heard the shots."

I thought that unlikely. Our house

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being old-fasioned, has thick walls, is set back from the street and the nearest neighbor is fifty yards away. I was wild with anxiety for Clarice and cursing myself for forgetting that the scoundrel might have had henchmen watching out for him.

Jake came back. "All clear," he said. "Nobody within a mile."

"Okay," said Maroni crisply. "If that Jane tries to scream when we're outside, knock her cold. Jake, go find a clothes line to tie 'em with."

He turned to me. "Where are the servants?" he snapped.

"Answer your own questions," I said insolently. For that I got a fist in my left eye as I had a right to expect. "Jake, go through the house. I suppose they're out or the shots would have started them yelling."

In five minutes Jake was back with a clothes line and a report that there was nobody else in the place. Prodded by Maroni's gun, I moved along sullenly, Clarice behind me, the thugs bringing up the rear.

"The idea is," said Maroni mockingly, "that you and your damned sister have taken your car and gone places. I'll give you a work-out tomorrow, Barton."

Well, I hate to admit that I had to lay down in the bottom of the car and let them rope me. If I'd have been alone, I'd have tackled the three of them and undoubtedly would have been murdered. With Clarice on my hands—I had to be meek as a lamb.

Clarice lay down beside me and they tied her up while I writhed at the indignity. Jake got into the back seat while the other fellow climbed in behind the wheel.

"If one of them yells," said Maroni, "stick your boot in their faces and then gag 'em. Nice trip, Miss Barton."

"Go to the devil," cried Clarice furiously. He laughed unpleasantly and watched the car back out. In a couple of minutes we were headed for that oasis in the desert known at Palm Springs. A place called the Castle.

I knew a place called the Castle at Palm Springs. It was about six miles out in the desert, a large hideous two-story structure built of desert stones. There was a round tower on it and battlements. It had been built by an old woman who had made money in oil about ten years back when Palm Springs was a slumbering desert hamlet.

She lived there with a maid and a chauffeur. It was reported she had a lot of jewels. Anyway, one day the old lady was found strangled, her maid with her throat cut and the chauffeur and the car was gone.

Nobody, so far as I knew, had lived there since and it had been impossible to sell or rent the place. If there was to be a criminal hangout at Palm Springs, the Castle was an ideal place.

On the open road the car bounced around considerably and Clarice and I were hurled against each other. Our hands had been bound behind our backs and upon one of those occasions her fingers touched mine. She clung to them and began tapping on them. I understood. I had a ray of hope. I edged closer to her while Clarice's clever fingers began to work on the knots that bound my hands.

The journey took a very long time. There are dips in the boulevard as it enters the desert and the chauffeur didn't know how to take them. We were tossed about and I heard Clarice groan once.

"Hurt, dear?" I asked.

I received a vicious kick in the stomach from Jake.

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"Stop talking or I'll gag the pair of you," he commanded. We didn't speak again. Half an hour passed. My hands were free. My long arms wound around Jake's legs and I pulled him off the seat. The gun was resting in his lap. It hit me a glancing blow on the forehead. Jake had fallen over upon Clarice who screamed. I was feeling for the gun—I had it.

HEARING the scuffle, the chauffeur was braking hard—we had been doing a fair seventy miles an hour. I had time to secure the weapon, feel in the dark for Jake, locate his head and bring down the butt of the gun upon it with all my strength. I then pulled myself up and stood behind the driver. I let him feel the steel ring of the gun muzzle against the back of his head.

"Everything's all right," I said. "Stop the car and lift up your hands."

"You're standing on my dress, you big goof," cried Clarice.

"Shut up." I replied rudely.

The car came to a stop and the man at the wheel lifted his hands. He had a gun in a shoulder holster which I secured.

"Open the door and get out," I commanded. He was out in a jiffy.

I stepped off Clarice, stooped and found Jake, opened a door and threw him head first out on the road.

It was a beautiful moonlight night and there wasn't a pair of auto headlights in sight.

"Let's see you run," I snapped at the chauffeur and I fired a shot at his feet. He went off like a ten second runner. I then turned attentions to Clarice. It didn't take long to set her free and she joined me in the road.

"You can thank me," she said. "I untied your hands, didn't I?"

"Somebody did."

"What'll we do now? After I trapped Maroni for you, you foozled."

"Is that so? How could I know we were followed."

"You heard the doorbell ring, didn't you? If you had an atom of sense you'd have taken precautions. I'm bruised from head to foot and we don't know whether Maroni told you the truth or not."

"I think he did, the last time," I said with a grin. "Feel able to drive, Baby?"

"I can always drive."

"Then let's spend the night at Palm Springs. I—I'm kind of tired."

"Your poor boy—just out of the hospital!" she exclaimed. "You lay down in the back seat—how about that awful creature?"

She was referring to Jake who was beginning to wriggle. I took him by the collar and dragged him off the road.

"Shouldn't we take him to the hospital?"

"I hate hospitals. Let's go to Palm Springs. I have to have food—I had practically no dinner."

"Your poor hippopotamus. Are you going to leave that injured man in the road?"

"Certainly. How could we explain him?"

"Suppose he should die."

"Oh, I only hit him on the head. Step on it."

She did. My conscience didn't trouble me. If Jake died, it would be better for law and order.

I sat beside her in the front seat. "We'll go to the Desert Inn," I told her. "The people there know we're crazy and won't bother about the way we look. Clarice, now that we have escaped I don't think Maroni will dare

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to have Tim Cody bumped off—not after his confession to me in your presence."

"I hope you're right," she said dubiously.

IN about twenty minutes we rolled up to the Desert Inn where we had often put up for week-ends. They gave us a two-room bungalow and sent over half a ton of sandwiches and a tank of coffee. I really felt weak, yet under normal circumstances, what I had been through tonight wouldn't have given me a healthy glow.

Clarice, banging on my door, woke me in the morning. The hour was nine.

"You can have your breakfast in bed but you can eat more and faster if you make the dining-room before it closes," she called.

I rolled out of bed. "Say no more," I replied. "I'll be right with you."

"How do you feel?" she demanded as we walked swiftly toward the main building.

"Fit. I think I'd like to do eighteen holes of golf."

"Are you crazy?"

"Well, nine holes — maybe six. Where did you get the swell rags?"

"Rose early and bought them. You can't play golf yet, Dick."

"What I need is exercise."

She shut up because she knew that the more she protested the more determined I would be.

"After that," I said, "we'll drive over and have a look at the Castle. I'd like to keep that date with Maroni."

An hour later we drove up to the golf course. As we turned in toward the Club House a big English touring car was approaching. In the back seat sat an old gentleman and a middle-aged man. Clarice stared. "Upon my word," she exclaimed and bowed as the two cars passed.

"Snubbed," I jeered. "Who are those purse-proud plutocrats?"

"The poor old dear," she said. "I'm so glad."

"Glad about what?"

"That he got out of the Soldier's Home."

"Nerts as usual."

"I mean the old man. That's Papa Donnegan. When I was going in for Charity a year or two ago I used to visit the Home at Sawtelle. Papa Donnegan was one of the characters. He had been there for years and years. Maybe he has come into money."

"Or rich relatives found out about him. He's sitting pretty."

At the Club House the secretary shook hands. We were old customers.

"You just missed our celebrity," he said. "Must have passed him."

"Who?" exclaimed Clarice.

"Jonathan Steele, the multimillionaire.

"Oh!" exclaimed Clarice. I rocked with laughter and thumped my thighs.

"Shut up, you laughing jackass," she said vindictively. "Let's find out if you can go nine holes. We'll have to rent clubs. Anyway he looks like Papa Donnegan."

So we went out and shot nine holes and I was willing to quit.

After that we drove out into the desert on the road to Indio and presently came to the side road that led toward old Mrs. Murther's Castle. A man bobbed up from the bushes she had planted.

"Back out," he called. "Private road!"

"Hello, Jake," I called. "How's the conk?"

I lifted Jake's revolver as I spoke and pointed it at him.

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"Phone Maroni he needn't come down here on my account," I jeered and backed the car down to the main road.

"No sense in butting into that," I remarked.

"Of course not, let's go back to Los Angeles. There may be some word from Tim Cody."

"I'll swear out a warrant for Maroni on a charge of kidnaping and have him chucked into jail I've drag enough for that despite the Steele Motor interests."

"How is that going to help find Tim?" she demanded.

"Well, one thing at a time."

So we went back to Palm Springs and took the road to Los Angeles. Which demonstrated that even fellows with as much on the ball as yours truly can make a mistake. We should have remained at Palm Springs.

From this point the story is told by Tim Cody

CHAPTER XVIII

Ma and Pa Piper

AFTER the first ten or fifteen minutes, freezing to death is not a bad way to die When I came into headlong collision with the side of a horse that night in the blizzard in Wyoming I bounced back and just nestled down into the nice white soft snow and closed my eyes and went to sleep.

I woke up in a bed. The sun was shining through the windows of a small room with whitewashed walls and ceiling. The floor was of rough planking partly covered with round hook rugs. There was an old oak bureau with a cracked mirror and an unpainted pine commode.

For a while I couldn't dope out where I was and then gradually I remembered what had happened the previous night. I'd passed out in the snow after bumping into a horse—but if I was in a bedroom in a house, there must have been a rider on the horse who had brought me in. I shuddered as I recalled the heavy snow, the wind and the cold. The room was pretty warm and the old-fashioned woolen comforters that were piled on me were hot and heavy. I threw them off and laughed out loud. I was wearing a nightshirt and one that was a pretty tight fit. I sat up. A little dizzy but all right. My head felt sort of empty.

"Wonder what's out there," I said aloud and I walked to the window. The knees wobbled a bit but I made it all right. I looked out and I gasped. Where was I? Where on earth had I been carried? Last night there had been a big blizzard, eight or ten inches of snow—and there was no snow at all. I gazed upon a vast flat expanse of land with a fringe of pink and purple mountains on the horizon. It looked like the Wyoming landscape I'd seen from the plane coming west. I saw an unpainted tumble-down barn and some store houses. In a field over there were a score of cows and two or three horses nibbling at dead grass. I saw wire fences in all directions but not a tree in the whole countryside.

The thing that knocked me for a loop was absence of snow. I got frightened. I tried to open the window but it had no window cords. You had to lift up the sash and hold it up until you could put a stick under it. I did that and stuck my head out. Why it was warm out, almost like summer. I dropped the window sash and scuttled back to the bed and threw myself face down on it.

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I realized what no snow meant. I'd been here a long time. How long? Weeks, maybe, months. Why this was awful. I thought of Steve Steele—what had happened to him—what good had I been to him? Of Dick, wounded in the hospital, of Clarice. Rhoda. Rhoda had pinned all her hopes on me and I had fallen down on her. I was sure the Bartons would understand that something had happened to me. They must believe I was dead. I wondered if Clarice felt very sorry. A girl like that, a marvelous sport, brave as a man—of course Clarice wouldn't cry her eyes out over me. I knew the Bartons would be glad to learn I was alive. I'd put a long distance phone call through.

Roscoe Patterson had things all his own way, damn him. Well I wasn't through yet. I had a score to settle with Joe Maroni, too.

That reminded me of the boys in the automobile. I had killed or wounded one of them. What had they done? Gone on or were they hanging around hunting for me.

The door opened noisily and a woman poked her head in. I looked at her and had to grin. I hadn't seen a woman like that since I was a kid and my grandmother was alive. She had a round, sort of flat face and round faded blue eyes. Her iron gray hair was pulled straight back and tied up at the back in a "bun." She had on a shapeless kind of gingham dress, pink with white dots. I think they used to call them "Mother Hubbards." She had big red hands and she wore a pair of men's Congress shoes. But she had a sweet smile and her eyes lit up when she saw I was awake. I remembered my bare shanks in the nightshirt and dove under the covers.

She stuck her head out of the room. "Elijah," she called in a very shrill voice. "The boy's awake. Come on up."

I HEARD heavy boots on stairs that squeaked and groaned and there came into the room another queer object. This was a man with black hair and red whiskers so long he didn't need a necktie. The hair hadn't been combed for years by the look of it. It stood straight up. His teeth when he grinned were yellow and broken. He wore cowhide riding boots, a jumper and overalls that were rolled up to the knees.

"How you feelin', son?" he asked very kindly.

"All right, thanks. How did I get here, sir?"

He sat down in a wooden chair and made to put his feet on the bed but the old lady called sharply, "Elijah!" and he dropped them to the floor with a bang.

"I jest toted you, son," he said. "You run slam bang into my hoss and keeled over. Remember that?"

"That's the last I remember."

"You was asleep when I lifted you up and I shook you awake and had to keep punching you and pinching you to keep you awake. I put you on Benjamin, that's my hoss—he's twenty year old—"

"Oh, what does he care how old yer pesky hoss is?" asked the old lady.

"Well Benjamin brung you home. I wasn't sure where I was myself but Benjamin can smell his oats in any blizzard. It was only a mile and a half. Then Maw took charge of you. Had luck keeping you from frostbite but you were plum out of your head. You got a girl named Clarice?"

"I know a girl named Clarice," I admitted.

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"Well you carried on somethin' awful about her. And there was a man named Macaroni that you didn't like much—"

"Now, paw, you got no business telling him what he said when he was out of his head."

"How long have I been here?" I asked eagerly.

"Let's see now," he said thoughtfully. "Four or five days I guess."

"I thought it was last night but the snow was gone."

"Come on a warm spell the very next day. I reckon spring is here. I start ploughing tomorrow. What were you doing dressed in city clothes out on the highroad on a night like that, son? Lucky you didn't freeze to death."

"I—I had just left a motor car—was there a car with four men in it—one of them—er—hurt—is it still around?"

He shook his head. "Must have given you up for lost and gone on. We're only a mile from the road. Was it stalled?"

I nodded.

"Probably got going again," he said easily.

"Queer kind of friends you got if they didn't make no inquiries about you. Heartless, I say," remarked the old lady.

"I hardly knew them. We were driving—well, each paid his own expenses," I lied.

"Leaving a young boy to die," she said scornfully. "You must be awful weak. I had a hard time making you take nourishment. Well, I'll have roast chicken for you for dinner."

"I've got to notify friends in Los Angeles and New York. Can I phone a telegram?"

"Land sakes, we ain't got no telephone," she said. "We used to have one, but times got so hard we give it up."

"Might get them stuck-up Donnegans to send it. If I can get the car going I'll ride over and ask them. It's only seven miles," said Paw obligingly. "You got any money?"

I remembered that the Maroni gang had cleaned me out. "I can get money wired to me," I said.

"Reason I spoke," he said apologetically, "is we only got a quarter in the house."

The old lady nodded her head. "All the money we got in the world."

I stared at them. "But how do you live?" I demanded.

SHE laughed. "Oh, we live right well. We got live stock and chickens and vegetables and preserves. Nobody round here has any cash money except them Donnegans."

"They're trash just the same," he muttered.

"Elijah, the Good Book says not to speak ill of your neighbor but that's what they are. They have slathers of money but they wouldn't let you use their telephone less you paid for it. Anyway you're welcome to stay here."

"And you could help with the mlikin'," he said eagerly. "It's funny with times hard like they are a man can't get anybody to help out. Of course, I couldn't pay anything, but board and lodgings are something."

"I have to get to Los Angeles as soon as possible. I'll hitch hike—"

"They ain't any cars going through yet, so to speak," he told me. "In a couple of weeks, though, they'll be some. Maw and me live alone here. We had a boy that went to California and died."

"He looked something like you. I cottoned to you right away," she told

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me, and then her old eyes filled with tears and she wiped them with the rim of her Mother Hubbard.

"I'd like to get up and get dressed," I said hastily. "I'd like to go downstairs."

"You mustn't try to do too much," she warned me. "You got to take it easy for a few days. I'll fetch your clothes. Come on, Paw. We been here long enough. I have to put the dinner on."

"I thank you for saving my life Mr—er—"

"You'd ha' done the same for me, son," he said, much embarrassed. "Forgit it." They then filed out. Gosh, they were swell people.

I dressed and made slow work of it. After that I lay down for a little while. I worked it out that the gunmen had managed to find the road. Much as they feared Maroni, they were more afraid of the storm and getting buried in the snow like the people in the news reel. Hoping fervently that I had perished in the storm, they had managed to keep going along the highroad and had passed out of the picture. As they knew nothing of the country through which they were passing it wasn't likely that they would be able to locate the place where I had left the car—if they did come back. I was pretty certain that if they hadn't shown up by this time, they had gone on to Chicago.

I wondered if the man I had shot had died. I didn't care much. After a while I tried to go downstairs. The man and woman rushed up the stairs to help which was lucky as they were almost as steep as a ladder.

I arrived in a box-like sitting room. There was an old square piano, a horsehair sofa with holes in the upholstery and two horsehair upholstered chairs. On the wall were framed tracts and samplers with mottoes. There was a small marble topped center table with a huge Bible on it with a brass clasp.

The kitchen opened directly off the living room or parlor. It was a tiny house and very old. There was a wood stove in one corner that smoked a lot.

At the end of an hour they called me into the kitchen where we sat at a table with a red cloth on it and ate marvelous roast chicken. They had no coffee or tea because those were things they couldn't trade their products for at the village store. They were Mr. and Mrs. Elijah Piper, by the way.

It was apologizing for lack of tea which set Mrs. Piper off about the Donnegans.

SHE explained that she never envied anybody their prosperity but the Donnegans were the most shiftless worthless people in the whole county and everybody knew it and with hard working people put to terrible straits it was most exasperating for the Donnegans to have a new car and fine clothes and she was entitled to express her opinion if she wanted to.

"How did they get this money if they're so shiftless?" I asked just to make conversation.

"They didn't earn it, you may be sure," said Elijah. "It's old Tom Donnegan that brought them their luck."

"The worst of the lot," said Mrs. Piper acidly. "Too lazy to work on a farm when he was a young feller so what does he do but join the army. He picked a time when there was no war or anything. All he had to do was march around a little and eat free food."

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"And then he came back to live on the family," said Elijah with a chuckle. "He was lazier than ever and after a few years of putting up with him, they wrote to Washington and got him put in a Home in California."

"The Soldiers' Home," sniffed Maw Piper. "Only heroes are supposed to be let in but, through politics or something, they let him in."

"And he was there for twenty-five years never doing a stitch of work and living on the fat of the land. Young man, he was the most unprincipled—I always suspected him of stealing that sow, Elijah."

"But I still don't understand how the Donnegans got rich," I said, laughing. "This is marvelous chicken, Mrs. Piper."

"It seems he won a gold mine, throwing dice or something," she explained. "He couldn't have come by it honestly. So he left the Home and he's living in California and he sends the family a hundred dollars a month—" her voice was filled with awe as she mentioned that vast sum.

"And big checks every now and then as presents—of course they ask him for them," added her husband. He chuckled and his whiskers wagged roguishly.

"They were going to pile in their Ford and go out and live with him and care for his declining years but he wrote them they would only get money from him if they stayed right where they were."

We all laughed. "That was smart, anyway," I remarked. "How old is he?"

"Only the good die young," she remarked vindictively. "He must be seventy-two or three."

"Well, let's talk of somebody pleasant," suggested Elijah. "We always hoped to sell out and go to live in Southern California but I guess we never will. Tell us all about it."

So I told them the kind of things I knew they would like to hear about and then asked for pen and paper. "I'll write some letters," I said, "and get money. If you'll trust me for the postage stamps."

"A few cents won't break us, Maw."

"If they did, we'd give 'em to the boy," she declared with a motherly smile.

CHAPTER XIX

Hitch Hiker

"I DON'T see how you get along," I said. "You have to have cash for some things."

"We git along without 'em," replied Elijah. "We ain't paupers, son. We ain't any worse off than most of our neighbors."

"But your taxes."

"Ain't paid any for a couple of years. Nobody has."

"How about the Government Farm Loans?"

"Ain't borrowin' no money, 'less I can see how we can pay it back."

"Besides we're Republicans," said Mrs. Piper. "And we never had no political influence nohow."

"Gasoline for your car?"

"Some in the tank. Ain't used the car since last fall. You see, son, us folks out here swap things a lot and we get by. I'm sorry for them poor people in the city that has to buy food. We got plenty to eat."

"I'll say you have," I said emphatically.

I wrote letters to Rhoda and to Upton Reynolds and to Dick Barton. I was going to write to Clarice but for some reason I couldn't think what to

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say. Anyway Dick would show her my letter. I told them all what happened to me and where I was. I said I'd get on to Los Angeles somehow. Paw Piper said he'd take the letters over and get them posted the next day—he had too many chores to get away that day. "I'll take the postmaster a dozen of eggs and he'll put stamps on your letters all right," he assured me. "We got prime eggs."

I was so crazy to be on my way that I'd have walked to the highroad if I'd been able but I knew I'd have to lay up another day before I had any strength. I was learning about a kind of life that was strange to me. There wasn't a house visible. The neighbors that Maw talked about lived within a radius of sixty miles. Paw had been in the Village twelve miles away visiting a sick friend upon the night I collided with his horse. If he had stayed home I would have frozen to death in the blizzard. It was the kind of life that would have given me the jitters but Paw and Maw were nice homey folks who thought they were well off compared to the unemployed in the big cities. And I reckon they were, at that.

For supper that night we had cold ham and baking powder biscuits and cider and Maw apologized again because she didn't have any tea. I made up my mind I would send her a chest of tea and a hundred cans of coffee, if things got to be all right with me.

Next morning I woke up feeling like a million dollars. I came down for breakfast and had no trouble with the stairs. And—just as I had downed my second helping of ham and eggs, a knock came on the door.

"Land sakes, who can that be?" asked Maw, all in a flutter. She opened up and there was a big guy with a folding cap on and a mackinaw.

"Have you folks got any gas?" he demanded.

"Who might you be?" she wanted to know.

"I'm driving a truck through to Los Angeles," he said. "I run out of gas. I seen this house from the highroad and I came over. Got any gas?"

"Paw might have a few gallons in the tank of his Ford," she said. "But I reckon he won't want to sell it."

"How fur is the next gas station west?"

"'Bout ten miles—no, fifteen to the nearest one that's open."

"A couple of gallons would get me there."

"Say," I asked eagerly. "Would you take me along to Los Angeles?"

He looked me over. "Got any money?"

I shook my head.

"Expect me to grub stake you? Nothing doing."

Well, it was too much to expect. "I can get money in Los Angeles."

"And I heard that song before," he sneered.

Maw suddenly came to the rescue. "I can put up enough for you both to eat for three or four days," she said. "This is a very nice boy, mister, and he's got friends in Los Angeles. We're just finishing breakfast. Would you like some fried ham and fresh laid eggs?"

"Did I say 'no?'" demanded the truck driver. "Lady, you got a customer. How much?"

Maw bridled. "I ain't running no hotel. Nothing."

The fellow pulled off his mackinaw and pulled up a chair. He grinned at me. "If I can get a little gas here," he said, "and she wants to supply the victuals, you can ride with me, kid."

Paw came in, but demurred at

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emptying the tank of his Ford. "Don't know when I'll get money enough to buy more gas," he stated.

"Give you fifty cents a gallon, Pop. Scalper's prices but I don't want to walk ten or fifteen miles to a gas station."

"And he's going to take Tim to Los Angeles."

"I'll give you the gas, what I got," declared Paw Piper.

The truck driver was devouring the ham and eggs.

"Swell chuck," he affirmed. "Fifty cents a gallon. I'll take all you got. It ain't my money I'm spending."

PAW went out to the barn and came back presently with four gallons of gas in the five-gallon can brought along by the truck driver. He protested against taking two dollars, but took it. "Feel like one of them highway robbers," he remarked.

When I started off with the truck driver, I wore a shabby but warm overcoat contributed by Paw and a thick woolen muffler supplied by Maw. When I kissed Maw good-by, I had trouble not to blubber. She and her husband were certainly swell folks.

The truck driver's name was Jim Bridgeman. He had a van laden with furniture and his truck was old and cranky. He explained that he had a five gallon can full of gasoline, but it had fallen off the load somehow.

"Mostly you find a gas station every ten miles," he said, "but at this season many of them are out of business. That's how I got into trouble."

Well, I climbed up on the seat beside him, thanking my stars for a lucky break and we started off. About thirty miles an hour was our top speed, but we were going where I wanted to go. And we had sandwiches, apple and mince pies and five or six dozen doughnuts. Jim considered that he had put over a good stroke of business.

"Grub enough here to feed us both all the way," he told me. "All I got to buy is coffee. I'll stake you to your coffee, kid."

"Thanks, Jim," I said. "When we get there I'll give you twenty-five bucks."

"Same old gag," he said with a loud laugh. "I'll settle for a dime."

"Pull up in front of that big house, Jim," I said. "If the people are home you'll get twenty-five bucks."

Jim roared with laughter. "Still at it," he exclaimed. "Well, they won't be home. It's all right, Tim, me boy. I've been a panhandler myself. If you ain't got a place to sleep, I'll take you to my brother's joint, down on 63d Street where I'm going. He'll give you a shake down."

"There are lights," I said. "Jim, you're a great egg. Tonight I got to see my friends but tomorrow night you and I will lift a few—at my expense."

He brought the old truck to a stop and I got down on the sidewalk. "Hang round," I told him. "It may be a little while before I can come back."

"I'm in no hurry," he replied. "I'll smoke me pipe."

IT was three nights after we had left Mr. and Mrs. Piper's farm. We had stopped in front of the Barton house on Adams Street, Los Angeles. The whole down floor was lighted up and I almost ran up the path. It was going to be wonderful to see Dick Barton again—and Clarice.

I rang the doorbell. The maid took a look at me and made to close the door but, ex-cop that I was, I put my foot across the threshold.

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"Tell—er—Mr. Barton, Mr. Cody is calling," I said very loud.

"They're at dinner—"

She broke off because there were screams and shouts from the dining room, the tramp of feet. Dick and Clarice rushed through the doorway into the hall. Dick pushed her behind him. She deftly thrust out her foot, he tripped and went sprawling, landing on the floor on his face and hard enough to shake the house. Clarice came galloping, her face shining, her eyes brimming, a smile from ear to ear.

"Oh, Tim, Tim, you darling!" she screamed. She made a flying leap, I had to catch her in my arms and then she stuck her nose in my shoulder, sobbing like a child.

"You big stiff," she complained, "you've broken our hearts. Where have you been?"

"Leggo that woman," bellowed Dick. He was lumbering along, his right hand outstretched, his grin absolutely monstrous. "Drop her, I tell you and give me your flipper. The little beast tripped me up. Did you see her?"

I held onto Clarice but stuck out my left hand and he almost crushed it.

"Am I seeing things?" I gasped. Rhoda Robinson came into the hall.

"Yes, I am," I mumbled, for attorney Upton Reynolds, white whiskers and all, followed her out.

Clarice suddenly began to kick at my shins and push with her hands and I set her down.

"Have any of you got twenty-five dollars?" I asked anxiously. "I got to pay a truckman outside. He gave me a fifteen hundred mile hitch."

"Tim," cried Rhoda. "Tim, have you found Steve?"

It bumped off my joy as a wet blanket will put out a candle light.

"No," I muttered. "I've been in a tough spot myself, Rhoda."

"Young man," said Upton Reynolds, "we have all been very much worried about you. In fact we'd given up hope that you were in the land of the living."

"I hadn't," said Clarice. "I knew he was alive, didn't I, Dick?"

"Gosh, Clarice, you look swell," I said. I couldn't take my eyes off her. I had known she was a peach but I hadn't thought she was as pretty as she was. Why, Rhoda had nothing on her and Rhoda was beautiful.

"You're gotten up for a barn dance," laughed Dick. "Take off that Chic Sales overcoat for heaven's sake."

"I want twenty-five dollars from somebody," I persisted. Dick stuck his hand in his pocket and pulled out a wad. He thrust it all at me. I opened the front door and went out and the entire outfit followed me like a flock of sheep. Jim was standing on the sidewalk smoking his pipe. His mouth dropped open, the pipe fell on the sidewalk and broke, his eyes crossed in his astonishment.

"Jim," I said. "I want you to meet my friends." I introduced them gravely. He wouldn't shake hands with the girl.

"Me mitts are dirty," he said, blushing like a tomato. "I don't want that dough, Tim. You and me had a swell time on the road."

I FORCED the twenty-five on him. "I'll look you up tomorrow or the next day. I have your address," I told him. "Much obliged, Jim."

"Lissen, people," said Jim. "He told me he had friends with a lot of jack but I thought he was a goldarned liar."

With that he climbed on his box and

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started his truck. Clarice took my arm and Rhoda took my other arm and we went back into the house.

They led me into the library and Dick pushed me into a chair. "Now," he said, "let's have it. From the beginning."

"I waited with the car an hour and a half for you," said Clarice.

"If you interrupt again, I'll throw you out of the room," bellowed Dick. She wrinkled her nose at him and smiled very sweetly at me.

So I told them everything, starting with me being such a sap as to let one man hop my cab and stick me up. It took quite a while but they all stood there in a row. Both girls got horribly excited when I was telling them about the battle in the blizzard and they just cooed over Maw and Paw Piper who were doing nicely with only twenty-five cents in the world.

"A most amazing narrative," declared Mr. Reynolds. "If so many strange things hadn't happened recently, I would declare it incredible."

"Your luck was with you, old lug," said Dick Barton. "Would you be interested to know that Clarice and I were taken for a ride ourselves night before last? I lured Maroni here and was squeezing a confession out of him when—er—the tables got turned."

"Because you paid no attention to the doorbell. Tim, if I hadn't unloosed his hands, heaven knows what would have happened to us."

Rhoda spoke. "Can't you see the poor boy is bewildered? Have you had dinner, Tim, dear?"

"All I've had for three days is cold food and coffee."

In another minute we were all at the dining room table and the roast beef was coming back. While I ate, Dick, with interruptions from Clarice, told of the attempt to handle Joe Maroni the way Maroni had handled other people. I listened spellbound.

"Ahem," said Mr. Reynolds, when things finally had quieted down. "I wish to state, Mr. Cody, that you are at liberty to draw on me for the remainder of your legacy."

"And on me for everything I own," cried Rhoda. "Tim, do you still think that Steve is alive?" Her eyes were pitiful.

"Yes," I said stoutly. "If he was alive a week ago, he's still alive. With us knowing as much as Patterson knows we know, he won't risk another murder."

"The situation, however, remains in status quo," declared Mr. Reynolds. "During your absence we have made no progress in solving the mystery."

"We know positively, now, that Ambrose P. Adamson was the person killed on Central Avenue," said Dick. "I've learned that the missing little finger was declared by Jonathan's secretary to be a positive point of identity. He lost two joints of the finger while in Europe, according to the secretary.

"And the police say that Jonathan himself saw the body and identified it," added Reynolds, "which fogs the situation again."

"But Rhoda and I know that Dick had all his fingers," I exclaimed.

"Of course," said Rhoda emphatically.

"Is Maroni still in town?" I demanded.

"Under the name of Lafe Morton he is registered at the Biltmore. He hasn't made a move against us but we're on guard," Dick replied. "About the only change in the situation is that Jonathan has moved back from Palm Springs to his house in Santa Barbara."

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Clarice, unexpectedly, g i g g l e d. "What's eating you?" growled her brother.

"We saw Jonathan at Palm Springs," she said. "He had been playing golf."

"You see," declared Reynolds. "There is nothing the matter, mentally or physically with him if he can play golf. I saw him on the golf course myself at a distance. I was going to accost him but I was discouraged by some sort of bodyguard who said he didn't wish to talk to anybody on the golf course."

"How does he look?" I asked curiously. "I saw him ten years ago on the one occasion when he called on Steve at the Eli Evans School."

Clarice exploded with laughter. "He looks," she declared, "like poor old Tommy Donnegan."

I dropped my knife and fork and stared at her.

DICK whooped and thumped the table. "She knows it all. She sees this ancient veteran ride by in a fifteen thousand dollar car and bows to him, but doesn't get a tumble. And at the club they tell us we have just ridden past Jonathan Steele."

"Did you say Tommy Donnegan?" I asked Clarice sharply.

She nodded.

"Who is he?"

"A cute old thing in the Soldiers' Home in Sawtelle. I used to help entertain the soldiers and I always talked to Tommy. He had a remarkable sense of humor."

Dick started talking about Maroni and I sat there thinking. I was scared at my thoughts. The most incredible notion had flashed into my mind.

Tommy Donnegan, Maw Piper's bête noire.

"Clarice," I said. "Will you please call up the Soldiers' Home and ask if this Donnegan is still there?"

"Of course, he is. They stay there until they die and get a military funeral."

"Please call up," I repeated. She flashed me a smile and meekly left the table.

"Look here," exclaimed Dick. "We've important things to consider and you wander around like a blindfolded jackass. Though Clarice is no help to serious conversation."

"Well, let's hear some," I said, laughing.

"We're stymied. We're stopped cold. Jonathan's identification blocks us from getting anywhere with the Adamson business. I'm in this up to my neck now. I want to find Steve for Rhoda here. I want to get my claws on the throat of that scoundrel Maroni—"

Dick was roaring, working himself into a passion, but Clarice came back into the room. He stopped short.

"Tommy isn't at the Home any more," she said. "It's very interesting, really—"

"Not to me," interrupted Dick.

"To me it is, Clarice," I said quickly. She resumed her chair.

"Well, about a year ago some relatives in Wyoming left Tommy a fair sized fortune so he went back there. The superintendent told me the place—"

"Blacklands," I said.

"Why, yes. How do you know?"

"I heard about the Donnegans. They are neighbors of Mrs. Piper."

"Oh, did you see Tommy?" she exclaimed.

"No," I said slowly, almost timidly. "But I think you did."

You could have heard a pin drop.

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And then Dick emitted a horse laugh. "Of all the cock-eyed ideas—"

"You mean it was Tommy in that car at the Golf Club in Palm Springs?" Clarice asked excitedly.

"It was Jonathan Steele," declared her brother. "You heard the secretary of the club. We met no other car.

"And it was the kind of car that only Jonathan could afford."

CHAPTER XX

Tommy or Jonathan?

"I HAVEN'T a theory, Dick," I said very slowly. "I don't dare. But if Donnegan came into money he didn't get it from Blacklands, Wyoming. His people were shiftless, worthless dirt farmers. During the last year he has been sending them money on condition they don't come out to join him. Their story is that he secured a gold mine."

"A man is found dead and identified as Stephen Steele," said Dick thoughtfully. "But we know that he wasn't Steve. Now Jonathan Steele is not Jonathan Steele, but an old vagabond named Tommy Donnegan. Too thick, brother, too thick."

"I had a flash," I told them. "Wild, perhaps, but it would explain the things we haven't been able to explain. I hardly dare tell it."

"I am very much interested," declared Mr. Reynolds.

"Well, damn it, so am I," confessed Dick.

"Jonathan Steele is dead—he died unexpectedly a year ago. They took an old soldier who resembled him, whose character according to the people where he comes from was bad, put him up as Jonathan and Patterson carried on."

It sounded so crazy that my voice weakened as I proceeded.

"Go on," commanded Dick.

"It explains why people were ready to shoot at Santa Barbara, even when they saw we had a woman with us. It explains that gunman hangout at that Castle place you spoke of in Palm Springs. It explains why Jonathan identified Adamson as Stephen Steele. He didn't know what Steve looks like."

Rhoda's eyes were like stars. She clasped her hands. "It explains why they made a prisoner of Steve. No impersonator could have fooled him."

"Now wait a minute," pleaded Dick, his forehead wrinkled, his mouth taut.

"Listen to me," exclaimed Clarice, "it explains why Jonathan came back to Santa Barbara. Tommy Donnegan knows me. The old coot used to hold my hand and pay me compliments. He recognized me all right the other day. They found out who I was and whisked him back to Santa Barbara."

"Tell me the why of all this," demanded Dick.

"Mr. Reynolds," asked Clarice sharply, "suppose it's true, that Jonathan is dead and they have Tommy in his place, how would this Patterson profit?"

The old gentleman put the long fingers of his thin white hands together and cleared his throat.

"Your theory is preposterous, Cody," he said, "but, in answer to Miss Barton's question I will say this. A year ago the stock market was in bad shape and industry, generally, was only just beginning to function. In former times, when a great industrialist died his heirs took over and there was no economic disturbance."

"I get you," exclaimed Barton. "By

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the great telescope of Christopher Columbus!"

"Where did you think that one up?" asked Clarice.

Mr. Reynolds smiled at her and resumed. "Under recent tax laws a great estate must pay enormous inheritance taxes. This requires great liquidation. To pay the State and Federal Governments percentage of an honest valuation of many such estates, their assets have brought so low a figure that there was nothing left for the heirs. I recall several instances of such flagrant injustice!"

"Never mind them. Go on." cried Dick impatiently.

"Not knowing the condition of the Jonathan Steele Corporations a year ago," he said slowly, "I don't know if the sudden death of the old gentleman would have thrown the companies into bankruptcy. The hurling upon the market of vast quantities of the stock certainly would have depressed them to a very dangerous degree. Take Patterson. No doubt he owns millions of dollars' worth of the stock. It would have caused him enormous personal losses. Certainly the interests of all concerned except the heir of Mr. Steele would be best served by the status quo."

"You win, Tim," declared Dick Barton. "I'm convinced. Tommy Donnegan is Jonathan Steele."

"And when Steve arrived in New York," exclaimed Rhoda, "he wired his grandfather he had something of great importance to discuss with him."

Which scared the conspirators out of their wits," finished Dick. "They got hold of Ambrose P. Adamson. I've a picture of him, Tim. Rhoda says he doesn't look any more like Steve than you do. I can't quite figure the business here in Los Angeles—"

"PERMIT me," requested Mr. Reynolds. There was a gleam in his eye. "An explanation of what has puzzled us so much occurs to me. Of course, Stephen could not be permitted to see his grandfather. I happen to be well acquainted with Roscoe Patterson. I consider him unprincipled, but not the sort who would deliberately plot murder. The plot was not as coarse as that." He paused and cleared his throat.

"I believe that the murder of Adamson was not intended—that Patterson had no part in the thing."

"As a lawyer you're all right, Upton," said Dick disgustedly.

"Shut up," snapped Clarice. "Let an intelligent lawyer talk."

"My dear, your brother is an excellent lawyer," said the old gentleman with a smile. "A bit impatient, a man of action rather than a student—"

"I surrender," declared Dick with a grin.

"Very well. Stephen was to be secured when he arrived in Los Angeles and locked up somewhere. When he was safely out of the way, this Adamson person appeared at the Biltmore and registered in his name. Have you inspected the signature on the register, Mr. Cody?"

"No," I confessed. "I guess I'm not much of a detective."

Adamson was told to paint the town red, to make the name of Stephen Steele known in all the haunts of vice. Being a person who enjoyed dissipation, he seems to have done his work too well. No doubt it was intended that his attentions to a Negress in this Central Avenue place should get into the papers. Well, her lover was not consulted. He cut Mr. Adamson's throat."

"We know that," said Dick. "What are you driving at?"

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"That Patterson was probably shocked and frightened when he heard of it. It was entirely possible that, in his wanderings, Adamson might have met people who knew him in his own person. Miss Robinson's accusation and your investigation, Cody, might have attracted the attention of such people. Steele, apparently having been murdered and in a way that couldn't be pinned upon the conspirators, they made the best of it."

"But why didn't they want him killed?" I asked excitedly.

"My dear young man, why let him riot for three days before killing him? To me it is very plain. It wasn't necessary to kill Stephen Steele. I expect the plan was to turn him loose after his impersonator had made his name a stench in everybody's nostrils."

"You're priceless, Upton, old boy," declared Dick. "You are an ornament to the American bar. I think you worked out this puzzle perfectly. But where do we go from here?"

Reynolds pulled his right side whisker. "My dear boy," he said. "I haven't the faintest idea."

I pushed back my chair. "Santa Barbara," I stated. They gaped at me and I stood up. "As Dick says we can't take this cock and bull story into court. I believe that Jonathan is really Tommy Donnegan. I know that a notorious racketeer named Maroni has the job of keeping everybody away from Jonathan. He hasn't as many men as he had. Four of them have gone to Chicago and will be careful to keep out of his way because they let Tim Cody get away. Probably there are not more than half a dozen of them at the Santa Barbara estate."

"Which is plenty. There are only two of us," said Dick. "You think we ought to tackle them?"

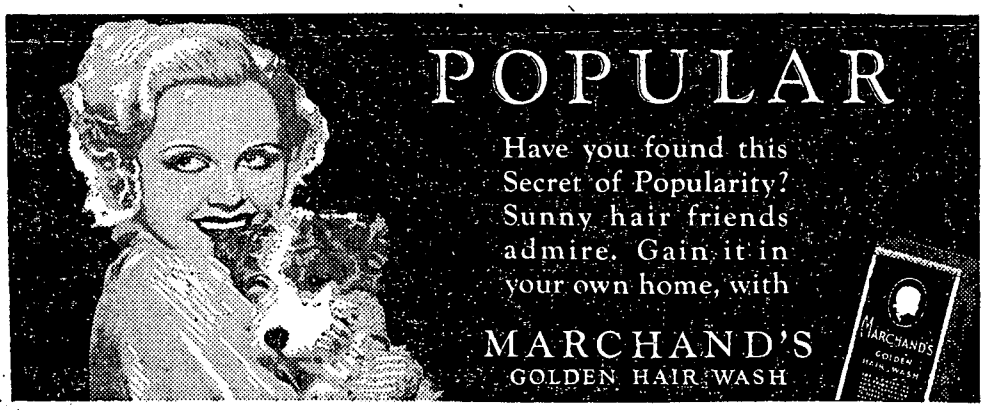
"The other time we were like thieves in the night," I said. "They opened fire on us and we ran for it. This time we shoot it out with them."

"No, no," cried Rhoda. Clarice stared at me with shining eyes.

"Cody," snapped Reynolds. "You can't do that. It outlaws you."

"It's a fetching idea," remarked Dick Barton. His eyes had a mad sparkle in them.

Will Tim Cody and his friends decide to storm the hide-out of Maroni's desperate gangsters? If Lawyer Upton's ideas about this amazing case are not correct, Tim and Clarice and her adventurous brother will find themselves in a jam that no amount of pull and political power will be able to fix! So don't miss the concluding installment of "DEAD MEN TELL TALES" in the next issue.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Fatal Make-Up

"Wait! I don't want you out of my sight for a second!"

DETECTIVE D F W SHORT

By John A. Saxon

PRIVATE DETECTIVE BUCK WHALEN was accustomed to the eccentricities of Hollywood. In five years he had listened to a lot of weird ideas as to who might kill who and why, what clique was out to cut whose financial throat and what about it, and a lot of other studio chatter that never got beyond the big gate. The big shots of filmdom were always imagining that somebody was out to get them and so, as he listened to Jack Rosenthal's clipped, nervous sentences, he seemed more interested in the end of the big cigar the director general of Globe Cinema Productions had handed him at the beginning of the interview, than he was in what Rosenthal, known to his intimates as "Rosie", was trying to impress upon him.

The Crimson Stain on That Lethal Blade Was Not Blood —Yet Without a Question It Marked the Murderer!

"Three times in the last week somebody has tried to get me," the producer said, tapping nervously on the end of the desk with slim fingers. "I tell you, Buck, they're after me. Last night I went out on Sound Stage 5. A counter weight dropped from the grid-iron, missed me by six inches, tore a hole

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a foot deep in the floor of the stage."

"Accident, probably," cut in the detective.

"Yeah? The rope was cut, but there was nobody higher up than the juicers' stands."

"Look, Jack," said Whalen, pale blue eyes staring out under bushy brows as he hunched his thick shoulders higher in the chair opposite the producer's desk, "you've been working hard lately; the shooting schedule has been darned heavy. Don't you think that you ought—"

Rosenthal shook his head.

"No dice, Buck," he said slowly. "You can't kid me out of it. I know somebody's after me."

Whalen smiled indulgently, sighed as though dealing with a recalcitrant child and said: "All right. Let's analyze it. Who, and why?"

The tempo of Rosenthal's drumming fingers slowed.

"I've been in this business twenty years, Buck," he replied, his brow wrinkling. "In that length of time I've made a lot of enemies—anybody in my position would. Some of them are pretty close to home."

"Just how close?" asked Whalen, indulgently, laying his cigar across the bridge of a silver ash tray and putting the tips of his fingers end to end.

It seemed that Rosenthal was going to skip the interrogation. His eyes shifted away from Whalen's, then back.

"It's tough to say this Buck, but my own wife—my own son, and—"

He hesitated for a long moment before he added:

"—Jim Troy."

Whalen's lower jaw dropped in surprise.

"I thought Jim Troy was your best friend," he said, with a puzzled frown.

The producer's head moved slowly from side to side.

"That's what a lot of people think," he answered. "As a matter of fact Jim Troy—we were partners once. We split over the masking device I invented for process shots. He claimed it was his development, his idea. Then I married the woman he wanted—that was more my bad luck than his, however. She married me to spite him, and I think she still loves him, always has. She has turned my own son against me. He'd like to see me out of the way—like to put his own ideas into effect here in the studio."

There was a world of bitterness in his voice.

"Outwardly, Troy and I have kept up a semblance of friendship. It would have been bad business to do otherwise. Under cover—"

There was a poignant pause.

Rosenthal shook his head uncertainly.

"Buck," he said slowly, "you've worked with me for years. I've always intended to do something for you and now—"

He reached into the drawer of his desk and brought out a package.

"Fifty thousand dollars," he announced, thumbing the end of the bills. "It's yours Buck, on one condition, that you do not leave me day or night for ten days. I'm paying you in advance for the job, and the rest is, well, a bonus for past services, put it that way."

Two words of the statement stuck out in the mind of Detective Buck Whalen.

"That's damned nice of you Mr. Rosenthal," he said, "but why ten days?"

Rosenthal reached into the desk again and handed the detective a slip

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of paper. On it, in crude letters, was printed in the form of a promissory note:

TEN DAYS AFTER DATE I PROMISE TO PAY YOU ONE MURDER.

Whalen laughed but it was a little forced.

"It's a gag," he came back. "You're being ribbed, and you can't take it."

The producer's glance was seriously grim.

"That's what you think, maybe, but twice they've tried to get me in the last twenty four hours and—"

There was no mistaking the fact that Jack Rosenthal was in fear of his life.

Buck Whalen dropped his bantering tone.

"Hell, Jack," he said earnestly, "if that's the way you feel about it, I'll stay with you day and night. Forget the fifty grand—you've always paid me well—"

Again the producer indicated a negative.

"I want it this way, Buck," he said. "Besides, who'd pay you unless you get it now—"

Whalen was breathing hard; fifty grand! All these movies were screwy. He had dealt with them for years. You had to humor them. A new house for Mary, college for the kids—

"You've hired yourself a twin," he said with a short laugh, shoving the money in his coat. "I'm going to eat with you, sleep with you, work with you, and if anybody bumps you off, it'll be because they got me first."

Jack stood up.

"One other thing, Buck," the producer said, moving toward the bottom of a flight of balustraded stairs that led to the floor above. Whalen knew what was up there—a bedroom, dinette, bath—Rosenthal slept there when he stayed all night on the lot. There was no entrance to that apartment save through the room in which they both were.

"There's one trick about those process shots that nobody knows but me. It's a secret chemical that keeps the grain out of the laps, and I'm the only person who knows what it is. The formula is written down on a slip of paper in a hidden safe upstairs. I want you to keep it, and if anything happens to me, turn it over to my lawyers. They know what to do with it. I'll get it and then we'll go to the commissary for a snack."

"Wait!" ordered Whalen, sharply. "I don't want you out of my sight for a second."

"If you don't know where that safe is, you'll never have to lie about it, Buck," countered the producer. "One other person knows—but that person doesn't enter into this— Tell you what. I'll keep talking to you all the time."

Grudgingly, Whalen made a gesture of agreement. Rosenthal reached the upper landing.

"Have you seen Gladys Dubois in her latest picture?" he called, as he stepped out of sight at the top of the stairs. "I'm running a print of the foreign negative as soon as I have something to eat. Want to come along?"

"You're damned right," agreed Whalen, forcefully. "You'll find me at your heels for—"

A sudden premonition raced over the detective; a creepy sensation wriggled the length of his spine.

"Jack?" he called, his voice tense, low.

No answer.

"Jack?" he repeated, louder this time, as he started up the stairs two at a clip.

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Halfway to the top, something struck him with the force of a battering ram, sent him sprawling to the bottom of the stairs. A heavy body laid across his knees. He struggled erect.

What the hell had happened. Rosenthal hadn't been out of sight thirty seconds. The lights were as bright as day. Yet at his feet laid the dead body of Jack Rosenthal, a brass handled knife sunk to the hilt in his throat. Around the crooked guard that separated the handle and the blade, a few drops of blood oozed slowly.

Whalen went up the stairs in three leaps, yanking his gun from its clip holster as he hit the landing. In less than half a minute he had cased the upper floor—found nothing.

Wait! The hand phone was off the cradle. He picked it up, guarding any possible prints by wrapping his handkerchief around it.

"Hello. Hello!" he said softly.

"Sorry, Mr. Rosenthal," said the girl at the switchboard. "Mr. Troy said he couldn't wait."

Troy! Troy had been on the line. Rosenthal hadn't been upstairs long enough to talk to anyone. Who had? If Troy had called Rosenthal from the outside, didn't that pretty clearly eliminate Troy as a suspect?

Years of police training brought logic to bear in place of temporary panic. Rosenthal hadn't left the landing at the top of the stairs. He couldn't have jabbed that knife in his own throat because it had entered at an angle that showed it had come from behind.

From the open window he could see the blue glare of the Kleigs throwing a halo above the stage skylights. Directly below was Jack Rosenthal's car, the colored chauffeur lolling in the seat, talking to a girl! No one could have left the bungalow by that window without having been seen by the pair, and their attitude indicated nothing of the sort had happened. He opened his mouth to call out; closed it again, jammed his gun back into its clip as he realized what might happen if he spread the alarm. Damn such a set-up.

He picked up the telephone; put it down again. His story was going to sound damned screwy, he realized that. Fifty grand in his pocket that he couldn't explain.

Downstairs again, he bent over and looked at the knife. It was an oriental antique with a carved brass handle. Not a chance for a print on it! Something caught his eye and he whipped out a handkerchief, touched the red mark on the handle of the knife; smelled. Fingernail polish! Already it was drying stiff on his handkerchief.

Buck Whalen's mind was racing. The minute he left that bungalow the murder would be discovered. He had been alone with Rosenthal for half an hour now. If he left, Rosenthal's secretary would come in and—

Buck Whalen realized if he was to get to the bottom of this killing he had to remain foot-loose. He had no time to answer the questions that would be asked by that big, leering mug, Andy Manheim, head of Homicide Division. Manheim would take great pleasure in throwing Buck Whalen into the can on the slightest pretext.

Fingernail polish. Still wet when he wiped it off the knife. That meant it hadn't been on the handle of the death weapon over two or three minutes. The collodion base would dry in that length of time. It must have been on the killer's hand, and men didn't use fingernail polish.

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Could the murderer have gone out the window? Hardly; the two at Rosenthal's car would have spotted such a move, given an alarm.

Something fluttered on the edge of the sill,—a tiny piece of yellow silk. That girl he had seen talking to the chauffeur—she had worn a yellow dress— But when he looked, the girl had disappeared. The position of the driver puzzled Whalen. He dropped out of the window, approached the car. The man's head was bent at a peculiar angle. He touched his shoulder. Unconscious! Drunk or doped. The girl had been putting on an act—

Back in his mind a voice kept saying: "Work fast."

A stage carpenter, white overalled, the inevitable hammer swinging loosely from leg-loops passed by.

"Seen anything of a girl wearing a yellow dress?" queried Whalen.

The man looked up, stopped, waved an indicative arm.

"Miss Dubois just came off the set. She was wearing a yellow dress. She went into her bungalow."

Whalen made for the star's bungalow adjoining that of Jack Rosenthal. He desired words with Gladys Dubois.

"Work fast," the voice kept saying. Any minute now somebody would go into Rosenthal's office to break up that interview.

He could see lights in Gladys Dubois's dressing room. No time for formality. He shoved open the door. he room was empty. But thrown over the back of a chair was a yellow silk dress that just matched the color of the strand he held in his fingers. He found the place near the hem where it had been torn on the sill of Rosenthal's window. What had Gladys Dubois done to Rosenthal's chauffeur, and why?

Leaving the bungalow he hugged the shadows to the main gate and went out on the off side of a sedan that was leaving.

Once on the street he breathed more freely. His car was parked half a block from the main gate. He got in, meshed the gears and headed west. In an hour at the outside he would be a hunted man. He had to move fast.

Buck Whalen knew Hollywood. He knew that the closest friend the dead producer had was Gladys Dubois. And so, to Gladys Dubois' apartment he went. He didn't bother with the front desk but went up the service stairs. When no one answered his ring, he opened the door with a pass key, looked around. He found an assortment of fingernail polishes, but nothing that matched the stain on his handkerchief.

That left but one card to play—Jim Troy. If Troy had been on the other end of that phone he wanted to know why he had called Rosenthal and who had answered the telephone, for he was sure Jack Rosenthal, talking with himself, had had no opportunity to do so.

He cracked the door open an inch, then widened it and started out into the hall. Wham! Bright lights scintillated, rockets left a trail of fuzzy sparks as they went their glittering way and then, darkness, utter and complete.

When his wandering thoughts began to reassemble themselves in a jumbled sort of way, Whalen's first consciousness was of touching silk. His fingers tightened over it and the pressure of the muscles along his wrist and arm sent a throbbing pain through his head that brought him back to consciousness.

Gradually he realized that he was holding to the hem of a silk dress suspended from a hanger over his head. Buck Whalen was locked in a closet.

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His mind began to function, jerkily. It was darker than the inside of a cow in that closet. He twisted around, felt for his gun. Gone! But the fifty grand was safe. That was of small consolation, however, for it established the motive of his having killed Rosenthal—that was the way it would look to Manheim of Homicide.

He sat up, rubbed his aching head. No use calling himself a fool for not anticipating a surprise attack. He had walked into it like a rookie. The thing to do now was to get out.

As he worked at the lock with a pocketknife, he tried to puzzle out the killing. Rosenthal had mentioned three people—his son, his wife, and Troy. Why had he omitted Gladys Dubois?

The lock finally gave and he stepped out into the apartment. His pupils contracted slowly as he went from utter darkness into blazing light and for a moment he could not see. When the irises came down, he swallowed hard. While he had been out cold in the closet the object of his search had come in. He had found Gladys Dubois all right, but she wouldn't answer any questions. She was stretched across the bed—dead. Around her throat was twisted one of her own silk stockings.

He looked at the telephone, half tempted to notify headquarters. Long years of detective work had instilled in his mind the axiom of the law—get the wheels rolling.

Nevertheless, he restrained the urge. Every clue up to that point indicated that he had been pretty close to both killings—too close for comfort.

He went out the way he had come in, found his car, and headed toward the United States studios. He wanted to find out why Jim Troy had telephoned his worst enemy, as Rosenthal had denominated himself, and what had happened while the receiver was off the hook.

At Santa Monica and Wilshire Boulevards the newsies were calling an extra. He grabbed one and read:

> Jack Rosenthal, director general of Globe Studios, was murdered in his office bungalow tonight by Buck Whalen, a private detective. Fifty thousand dollars known to have been in Rosenthal's desk is missing.

He read no more. What else could he have expected.

There was a radio in his car and he turned it on. With newspapers screaming the murder, police prowl cars would be on the watch for him. He needed his car but—

The radio was rumbling: "Calling cars 34 and 35 in 32's district," said the announcer. "Buck Whalen reported seen five minutes ago at Wilshire and Santa Monica, headed west—"

Damn! That meant they would be swarming like bees. He spun the wheel hard, ran up over the sidewalk and parked the car behind a billboard. He'd have to leave it now or they'd run him down in half an hour.

Back on Wilshire he grabbed a Yellow cab, headed west. His brain was working at top speed but he couldn't seem to add the thing up. Gladys Dubois had killed Jack Rosenthal. All right; she probably had plenty of reason. But who had killed Gladys, and why?

Two blocks from the United States Studios he dismissed the taxi, went on afoot. He knew there was no use trying to get in through the front gate. He was well known there, and would be spotted instantly. Near the corner of the studio on a side-street, there was a low tree. He climbed into it and rocked the slender sapling back and forth until

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he could catch the top of the wall. Then he swung himself over and dropped inside. Close to the service gate he hid his coat and hat, rolled up his sleeves and picked up an empty packing carton. Assuming a hurried, important manner, he got into the administration building without being stopped. Troy's office was on the second floor and he had seen a light in it.

The girl at the desk looked up as he came in.

"Prop department," he said. "Mr. Troy just telephoned for some stuff he wants to look at before—"

It was a hundred to one shot, but it worked.

He didn't knock on Troy's door but slid through the adjoining office used by Troy's secretary, long since gone for the day.

Troy, a small, slender man of fifty, almost tiny, sat at a desk over which a shaded light threw a circular glare. Something must have warned him of Whalen's presence for he suddenly spun around, eyes staring.

"Whalen! You! Good God man, why did you come here? The police are scouring the town for you."

"So you know, eh?" asked Whalen, his eyes steadily on the producer.

"Why in Heaven's name did you do it, Buck," queried Troy, nervously. "And then, of all things, to come here. You—you must have been seen coming in—"

Whalen shook his head.

"Who answered that telephone when you called Rosenthal tonight?" he asked, shortly. "And why did you call him?"

If Troy was surprised at Whalen's knowledge of the call, he gave no evidence of it.

"I—I'd rather not answer that—"

"You'll answer it or I'll choke it out of you," snapped Whalen belligerently. "I'm in a spot, and I'm not going to waste time—"

"Wait!" said Troy, as Whalen started across the room. "I'll tell you. I called Rosenthal to ask him why we couldn't settle that old dispute about the masking patents. We're both getting along in years—we used to be friends and—"

"What did he say?" interrupted Whalen.

Troy's eyes narrowed.

"He didn't answer the telephone."

"Somebody did. Who was it?"

There was a look of fear in Troy's eyes. It seemed that he was going to refuse to answer, but Whalen's manner was too compelling.

"Gladys Dubois," he said, softly. "I recognized her voice."

"What did she say?" Whalen prodded.

Troy seemed puzzled as he replied: "That's the queer part of it. She laid the phone down and said she would call Rosenthal. Then I heard a man's voice say: 'Gladys! What are you doing?' I waited a minute and then hung up the telephone."

"Was it Rosenthal's voice?"

"I couldn't tell."

"And you don't know of course, why she was there. Wasn't she supposed to be pretty friendly with Rosenthal?"

The producer shook his head a bit stubbornly.

"That's something you'll have to ask her," he countered.

"No chance," clipped Whalen. "She's dead."

Troy's lower lip sagged.

"Dead?"

Briefly Whalen told him what had happened.

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"I hoped that I would never have to tell anyone this, Whalen," said the motion picture man at last. "I—I know who killed Gladys, but whether she killed Rosenthal or not—"

He reached for his hat.

"Come on. We're going to Rosenthal's house."

"I couldn't get through the gate," said Whalen. "They'd spot me in a minute."

Troy pulled aside the window curtain, looked out.

"Go out the way you came in," he said. "See that sound truck in front of the laboratory? Get into it and lay flat on the floor. I'll drive it through the gate myself. They'll never suspect you are in it."

Whalen indicated his understanding.

The studio street was deserted for the hour was late. Bright lights burned in the labs but the rest of the lot was in darkness. He had waited his opportunity, slipped inside the truck, laid on the floor.

"All set," Troy whispered.

"All set," Whalen echoed.

They slid through the front gate, headed for the beach road and up the coast toward Rosenthal's home at Malibu.

Twice they were stopped. Twice Troy alibied himself through.

The sound truck was gathering speed now. Whalen recognized the bridge at Castellamare. Troy was driving like the devil himself. They must be doing sixty. The sound truck rocked from side to side. A spare vacuum tube above the mixing panel fell on the floor, splintered, the glass cutting Whalen's face.

On the ocean side there were sheer drops of thirty feet in places.

"Troy!" whispered the detective. A curve. They were into it now. Cripes!

He felt the left hand wheels hit the soft shoulder. They had been working on the road for weeks. Troy had swung too wide, they were in the sand—

Whalen struggled to his knees. Troy reached for the brake. As the producer's right hand went under the dash for the emergency, the panel light fell full on his hand. Whalen gulped. There was a red stain of fingernail polish in the center of the palm, and it matched the color on the knife that had killed Jack Rosenthal!

Whalen's mind raced back through the years.

He remembered now. Troy hadn't always been in pictures. For years he had been one of America's most famous vaudeville stars—

"Stop it, Troy!" he yelled. "Stop the truck, 'Blue Streak', or I'll—"

Crash!

The interior of the sound truck was filled with flying recording equipment. A pair of phones, dangling from the panel, clipped Whalen under the ear as they swung in an arc at the end of the cord, nearly put him out. He fought to retain consciousness as the truck splintered to the foot of the rocks. Outside he could hear the roar of the surf.

The wreckage was burning now and he had but a minute to spare. He dragged Troy out onto the sand. The producer was mumbling something. The fire reached one of the broken cans of film and the celluloid flared like a beacon light. That would be seen somewhere along the beach, bring help.

Troy groaned.

"I—I did it, Whalen," he whispered, the rattle of death already in his throat. "Gladys Dubois was my

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wife. We were married secretly years ago. Rosenthal struck at me in every way he could from the day we had our first trouble. Money didn't matter—we both had plenty, so he hit where it would hurt the most — Gladys. He made her a star—turned her against me. There was a secret panel between her dressing room and his office—"

The crackle of the flames drowned his voice. He coughed, frothily.

"And you," said Whalen, picking up the narrative, "remembering the days when you were known from coast to coast as 'The Blue Streak of the South', the world's greatest female impersonator, got back into character. You went to her dressing room, put on her clothes and went through the secret panel into the upstairs room. You wanted to be sure Rosenthal couldn't leave so you drugged his chauffeur. You needed an alibi and you used the extension phone, got an outside line and called back into the studio, telling the girl on the board who you were so she would remember. When she rung his telephone you muffled the bell and answered it yourself. You heard my talk with Rosenthal and it fitted into your plan as though you had arranged it yourself. When Rosenthal came upstairs you killed him and dropped out of the window, because I was too close on your heels to allow you time to use the panel. You pretended to talk with the chauffeur to fool me and then you went back to Gladys Dubois' dressing room, changed your clothes and make-up and took a taxi for her apartment, intending to kill her and make it look like a suicide. I got there first—you bungled your job on me in your haste to be ready for the girl when she came in. But your own attention to make-up detail spoiled the plan. Even in crime habit prevails. You tried to use nail polish, spilled the bottle on your hand and then abandoned the idea."

Down the beach road the whine of a siren ricocheted against the rocky cliffs.

All right, thought Whalen, let 'em come.

"Wasn't that the way it was, Troy?" he concluded.

But Jim Troy would answer no more questions. He was dead.

The blue white glare of a police car searchlight sent a probing finger over the wreckage, came to rest on Whalen.

"Down here, boys," Manheim's voice yelled, above the roar of the surf.

"Stick 'em high, Whalen," he said, sliding down the rocks, gun in hand. "I'm taking you in for the murder of Jack Rosenthal and Gladys Dubois and stealing fifty grand."

Whalen's dirty, blood-streaked face broke into a twisted grin.

"Don't be like that, Mannie," he said, shortly. "Gi'me a cigarette. Here's the guy who killed both of 'em. But he's out of your jurisdiction old kid. He's a coroner's case."

"Yeah?" snarled Manheim. "That's *your* story."

His probing hands jerked the package of money from the detective's coat.

"There's the motive, flatfoot. What's your defense?"

The insolent grin was still on Buck Whalen's face.

"All your life, smart guy," he retorted, "you've been looking for fingerprints on guns and knives. This time it's different."

He turned over the limp hand of Jim Troy.

"There's the print of the handle of the knife that killed Rosenthal, outlined in the wet fingernail polish that was in the palm of Troy's hand."

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ILLUSTRATED
CRIME
BY STOOKIE ALLEN
THE TORCH MURDER
NEARLY NINE YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE MIDNIGHT OF FEBRUARY 20, 1928, WHEN PALMER CAMPBELL, HIS WIFE, AND A NEIGHBOR NAMED JAMES MURDOCK, FOUND THE FLAME-COVERED BODY OF MARGARET BROWN ALONGSIDE THE BERNARDSVILLE, NEW JERSEY, HIGHWAY.
Miss BROWN
AT FIRST THE WOMAN AND THE TWO FARMERS THOUGHT ONE OF THE ROADSIDE REFRESHMENT BOOTHS WAS AFIRE. THEY WERE HORRIFIED TO FIND, INSTEAD, A WOMAN. AN ODOR OF GASOLINE WAS NOTICED AS THEY ROLLED THE BODY IN THE SNOW AND PUT OUT THE FIRE. THEY DROVE FRANTICALLY TO BERNARDSVILLE. THE WOMAN WAS STILL BREATHING BUT DIED WITHOUT REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS.
A NIECE OF THE VICTIM, MARY BROWN OF FORT LEE, IDENTIFIED THE BODY. MARGARET BROWN, IT SEEMED, HAD BEEN A GOVERNESS, EMPLOYED IN NEW YORK BY A WEALTHY FAMILY. IT WAS LEARNED THAT THE DEAD WOMAN HAD BEEN "KEEPING COMPANY," BUT NO ONE KNEW THE NAME OF HER LOVER, NOR WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE. THE SLAIN WOMAN HAD RESIGNED HER JOB AND WAS STARTING ON A TRIP TO CALIFORNIA TO BE MARRIED. SHE HAD TAKEN WITH HER EIGHT $1,000 BONDS AND $1,000 IN CASH. THIS INFORMATION WAS NOT PUBLISHED.
MARY BROWN

COMING SOON—

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BUT ON THE THIRD DAY AFTER THE MURDER, AUTHORITIES RECEIVED A LETTER, POSTED IN NEWARK, FROM THE SLAYER. ALTHOUGH UNSIGNED, IT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY GENUINE, FOR IT ENCLOSED TWO OF THE VICTIM'S BONDS AND $500 IN CASH.
"I AM VERY REMORSEFUL," IT READ. "I MET MISS BROWN TWO YEARS AGO IN BUFFALO, AND AGAIN LATER IN NEWARK. THE OTHER NIGHT I MET HER IN NEW YORK. WE DRANK SOME WINE THEN I DROVE OUT TO LOVER'S LANE AND PARKED."
THERE WAS A DISCLOSURE OF HOW MISS BROWN HAD REPULSED HIS IMPROPER ADVANCES.
"I HIT HER ON THE HEAD," THE LETTER CONTINUED, "AND SHE FELL. THINKING I HAD KILLED HER, I POURED GASOLINE OVER HER BODY, SET FIRE TO IT, AND DROVE AWAY."
THE WRITER EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD THROWN THE OTHER BONDS AND EFFECTS INTO A RIVER AND HAD THEN DRIVEN AROUND AIMLESSLY FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT.
"I AM STARTING AWAY," HE CONCLUDED, "GOODNESS KNOWS WHERE — TO HELL I SUPPOSE. I'LL KEEP GOING UNTIL MY MONEY GIVES OUT, AND IF I AM CAUGHT, I HAVE SOMETHING WITH ME TO END IT ALL."
DAYS PASSED; THEN WEEKS. THE POLICE STRIVING TO GET THE MYSTERIOUS KILLER, BELIEVED THEY HAD HIM WHEN THEY INVESTIGATED "DR." LOUIS CLEMENT, A DANE, OFTEN ARRESTED ON VARIOUS CHARGES. HE PROVED HIS INNOCENCE. ARMGAARD KARLGRAVES, SAID TO BE A GERMAN SPY IN THE WORLD WAR, AND HENRY CAMPBELL, A CIVIL ENGINEER CONVICTED FOR THE "TORCH MURDER" OF HIS BIGAMOUS WIFE WERE SUSPECTED, INVESTIGATED AND ABSOLVED.
AND SO NOW, ALMOST NINE YEARS LATER, IT APPEARS THAT THE BRUTAL SLAYER MADE GOOD HIS ESCAPE, ALTHOUGH THE CASE ISN'T MARKED "CLOSED."
DR. CLEMENT

THE CASE OF LAWYER GIBSON

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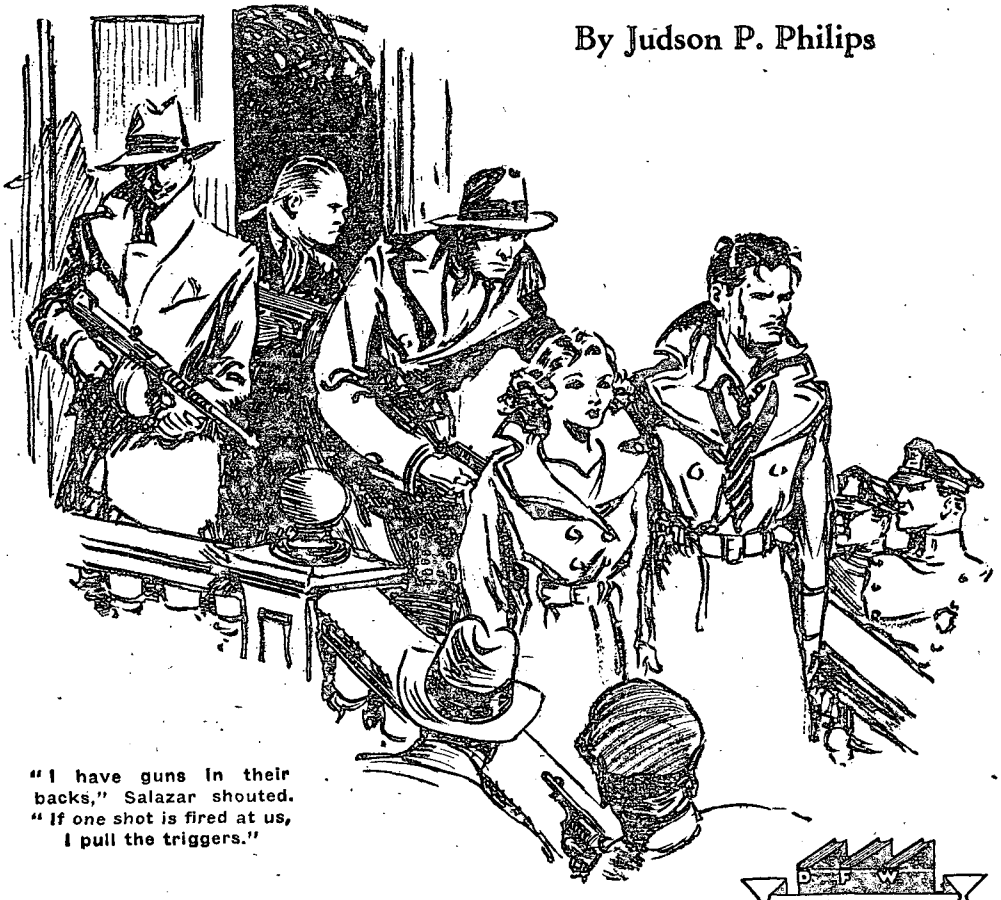
The False-Face Murders

By Judson P. Philips



"I have guns in their backs," Salazar shouted. "If one shot is fired at us, I pull the triggers."

3-PART NOVEL

What has happened—

AMAZING and sinister events have happened while John Jericho and Arthur Hallam—the Park Avenue Hunt Club—have been spending a week end at the country estate of John Malcolm. Marian Twig, a public secretary who had taken important notes for Malcolm, has been tortured and murdered by a criminal syndicate headed by a ruthless Mr. Salazar.

The Park Avenue Hunt Club, Having Cornered Dangerous Game, Discovers That One Incautious Advance May Change Victory to Defeat!

John Malcolm, too, was killed by the brutal murderer who breaks the back of his victim. A watchman was slaughtered in the garden. And Mary Malcolm, who has loved Saville since she was a little girl, and whom Saville loves in turn, has vanished.

After a night of gnawing anxiety, Saville and Jericho return to the Malcolm estate to rest, and Ar-

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for September 19

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thur Hallam sets out to pick up the killers' trail. He locates Salazar, Herman Schott and Major Bostwick, but they know him, torture him to gain information which they believe he has.

Meanwhile, at the estate, Saville receives a frantic telephone message from Mary Malcolm. Just as she is about to tell him where she is being held prisoner, the connection is broken, and Saville is morally certain that Orville Ray broke the connection. Ray is the man who had the conference with Malcolm, which was so important that the Salazar syndicate killed Marian Twig to learn about it.

Leaving the Malcolm place in disgust, for they can get no satisfactory answer from Ray, Saville and Jericho are met in the driveway by Senator Hiram Faucett, who claims to have known Saville many years before, but who actually did not. Faucett is posting a $25,000 reward for the capture of Malcolm's murderer. Saville is not impressed, and with Jericho, heads toward New York City to see what clues they can pick up in Ray's apartment.

They are surprised there by a man claiming to be Mr. Ray's man servant, but who actually is unfamiliar in the apartment. Leaving him there, after plausible explanations, they wait for him outside, trail him back to Woodstock, and discover the place where Hallam is being tortured. Through a desperate two-man attack they rescue their friend. The torturers escape.

In the meanwhile, Orville Ray has returned to his New York office, and is visited by Salazar, who frightens him into agreeing to board the *Queen Mary* bound for Europe that evening. Saville and Jericho learn of this and take him off the ship at the last moment, bring him to their Park Avenue apartment. They are surprised to find Wu, their Chinese servant, there, guarding Leon Battersea, John Malcolm's confidential secretary.

A little severe firmness makes Ray and Battersea reveal that they have hidden Mary Malcolm fearing she was the next to be murdered. When Saville and Jericho arrive at the West End address, there is a crowd outside and a number of police.

Apartment Six-B, where Mary was hidden, has been raided. Men with tommy-guns have killed the butler and a civil engineer named Edward Kennicott. Mary has vanished again, gone, undoubtedly, with the killers.

CHAPTER XVI

Dead or Alive

SAVILLE'S teeth bit sharply into his lower lip. The moment of stark horror that had swept over him faded, and in its place came a hard determination. This case was past handling by the police. There was only one thing left—to hunt out Salazar and everyone else who'd had a hand in this deviltry, and deal with them as only the Park Avenue Hunt Club could. He saw that Inspector Clark was looking at him, waiting for an answer to his question.

"I have every reason to think," he said, in a voice which he scarcely recognized as his own, "that the girl who was in this apartment was Mary Malcolm. I believe there's been a general alarm sent out for her."

Clark pursed his lips in a long low whistle. "Mary Malcolm, eh?" He turned to the cop in the doorway. "Telephone Inspector Doane and tell him to hop it up here," he ordered. Then he turned back to Saville. "We figured this was just some sort of a mob killing. I don't get the angle, Mr. Saville. We were given to understand that Mary Malcolm was being held by some crooks. If she was, who snatched her here?"

"I have a pretty good notion of that, Inspector," said Saville. "I think it was a man who calls himself Salazar and his mob. But it is in no sense a rescue! The danger to her is far greater now than it has been before, unless I miss my guess." His teeth grated hard together. "If I could just be certain that they took her out of here alive."

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"Perhaps you'd better have a look around the place," said Clark, stepping out of the doorway. "You may spot something here that I've missed."

Saville stepped through the door into the apartment. The living room of the flat was a gruesome shambles. Pictures, their glass smashed and the frames mutilated, hung crookedly on the walls, or lay on the floor. The room had literally been sprayed with lead. On the floor were the bodies of two men. One of them, a portly, gray-haired man in the clothes of a man servant, had fallen across a little table which had smashed under his weight. He lay on top of the wreckage, one arm crumpled grotesquely under him. Part of his face had been torn away. The other man, not past his middle thirties, lay in a strangely peaceful attitude on his back, staring with glassy eyes at the ceiling. The bullets had struck him in the chest, turning the white of his shirt into a sodden, crimson mess. Close by him on the floor lay a leather brief-case. It had been ripped open, and Saville could see from where he stood that it was empty.

"That one's Kennicott," said Clark, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You say you never heard of him?"

"Never," said Saville. He was thinking that scarcely anything could have lived in that room in the face of the hail of lead that had been fired into it. Clark evidently read his thoughts.

"These guys dropped in their tracks," he said. "There's not a sign of blood anywhere except right where they're lying. If anyone else was shot here, there's nothing to show it. The way I figure it, if the girl *was* here, they grabbed her before they started shooting."

"I hope you're right, Inspector," Saville muttered hoarsely. "But didn't the elevator man or the telephone operator in the lobby of the apartment see anything?"

"The killers didn't use the front way," said Clark. "There's a service elevator in back. There's no regular operator on it. The janitor or any of the rest of the help run it when it's needed. These birds evidently came up on it without anybody knowing. They went out the same way while everybody in the building was hiding under their beds after the shooting. Nobody saw anything. I've got men scouring the streets for witnesses who might have seen them come or go, but up to now they haven't turned anything up."

"You say this man Kennicott is a civil engineer?" Somewhere there must be a key to this thing. Somewhere there *had* to be a key!

"There was a business letter in his pocket," said Clark. "It's addressed to Kennicott and Smythe, Inc. It's about an estimate on some reforestation project up in northern New York, from the mayor of some town up there. Evidently the killers didn't think it was important because they left it lying on the floor. What he had in his brief-case was another story. They apparently snatched that—because I can't figure that this Kennicott was running around with an empty brief-case."

"All this is getting us nowhere!" Jericho broke out angrily. "We've *got* to move, Geoffrey! Who knows where they may take Mary or what they may have in store for her!"

"And where are you going to move to, John?" Saville asked wearily. "Is there anything here that you see that I've missed that tells us where they may have taken her?"

"No," snapped Jericho, "there isn't.

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How long ago did the shooting come off?" he asked the Inspector.

"'Bout an hour," said Clark.

"They could be thirty miles away, by now," said Saville. "But in what direction, John? How do we start?"

DURING the next ten minutes, Saville went over the apartment with a fine-tooth comb. Every nook and cranny of the place came under his search. There was just a chance, he thought, that Mary might have purposely left some clue—something that would start them on the way. But there was nothing. There was no evidence that a woman had been in the place at all except for a faint smear of face powder on the top of the bedroom dresser. Mary had had no extra clothes. Battersea had been bringing some to her when Wu had intercepted him.

He came back into the room where the bodies were. Clark had some further information for him. "This apartment was rented furnished only three days ago," he said. "A guy came in and paid a month's rent in advance—cash. Gave the name of Smith! Crooks don't have any imagination nowadays about aliases. The janitor describes him as a 'rich-looking guy' with a bit of a pot belly, gray hair, and a red face. Said he was carrying a roll that would choke a horse. Came in about eleven at night and wanted to occupy immediately. Ordinarily they insist on references and all that sort of thing, but the building's only half full and the cash on the line looked good to the superintendent."

That would be Orville Ray, Saville knew. He had evidently engaged the apartment before setting out for Woodstock, and had then phoned Battersea to get Mary at the fair grounds and bring her here. At least the story was beginning to check.

Then Inspector Doane arrived. He got Clark's story, snapping out a few sharp questions. Finally he turned to Saville.

"And what can you add to this, Mr. Saville?"

Quickly and concisely Saville told of having persuaded Orville Ray to admit he knew where Mary was. He didn't recount the *Queen Mary* episode in front of Clark.

"I left Ray and Battersea at my house and came over here to find her," he concluded. "Clark was already here. The damage was done."

The Inspector's face was grim. "Clark will follow up here. Let's go back to your place and have a talk with your friends," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

A Message from Mr. Salazar

RAY and Battersea were in the living room of the Park Avenue house. Wu was sitting on a chair opposite them, playing mumbly-peg with a murderous looking knife. Ray's face was anxious as Saville, Jericho and the Inspector came in.

"You found her?" he asked, eagerly.

"We were too late," said Saville. "We found your man servant and a fellow named Kennicott shot to death. Mary was gone!"

"Kennicott!" Ray's breath whistled between his teeth. He began to shake like a man with the ague. "Kennicott!"

"This," said Saville, "is Chief Inspector Doane of the homicide squad."

Doane's cold gray eyes surveyed the two men with distaste. Ray, his face the color of ashes, was muttering to

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himself. Battersea sat on the edge of his chair, holding his stomach as if it hurt him, rocking back and forth.

"Isn't it about time you gentlemen came clean?" Doane asked in a quiet voice.

"Oh, they're going to come clean, Inspector," said Jericho softly. "They're going to come clean."

"These men are my prisoners," said Doane. "The law will handle them."

Ray bounced out of his chair. "Prisoners! On what charge?"

"Abduction," said Doane calmly. "You confessed to Mr. Saville that it was you who spirited away Miss Malcolm. And if you hadn't confessed, the presence of your servant in the apartment where she was held is enough evidence to warrant holding you."

"Listen!" Ray jabbered. "Listen. You're wasting time with us. We're not criminals, Inspector. Mary Malcolm is in terrible danger. You may be too late even now. Don't waste time on us!"

"What danger is she in?" Doane was still very quiet.

"Good night, man, do you have to have it written out in A, B, C's?" Ray stormed. "Five people have been killed and Mr. Hallam has been tortured by these devils. Do you need a map drawn to tell you that if they've taken Mary she's in danger?"

"Where shall we look for her?" asked Doane.

"I don't know!" groaned Ray.

"Why have they taken her?" There was a sudden edge to Doane's voice.

Ray's lips clamped tightly together. He shook his head from side to side like a man in pain. "Listen," he said, choking on his words. "I've been warned. If I do any talking they'll get me—just as they've gotten the others. They'll get Battersea, too. Nothing will stop them. Can't you see the position we're in? We can't talk! *We daren't talk!* I want to live, Inspector."

"I wouldn't worry too much about danger," said Doane calmly. "You two are going to jail for abduction. Nothing will happen to you there!"

"You don't know," Ray cried. "They'll reach us somehow. They told me to go to Europe and I haven't gone. They'll think I'm crossing them. They'll—"

"Who is Kennicott?" Doane cut in sharply. "Where does he fit into the picture?"

Ray moistened his lips. "He was an employee of Mr. Malcolm's."

"What was he doing at that apartment?" Saville broke in.

"I—I sent him there," Ray faltered. "Mary—Mary had to know what this was all about. She controls her father's fortune now. She had to know."

"And Kennicott could tell her?"

"Kennicott could tell her the details of her father's plan. He could—" Ray stopped abruptly, capping a hand over his mouth. "You can't trick me into talking! I—I've said too much already."

Doane turned away. "What yellow filth!" he said disgustedly.

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't leave the room for a minute or two, Inspector?" asked Jericho, his blue eyes fixed on Ray and Battersea.

"You can't let him go to work on us, Inspector!" Ray screamed. "You're an officer of the law. I'll hold you accountable. I'm going to prefer charges against them for holding me prisoner here—for taking me off the boat."

"Every citizen has the right to arrest a criminal," said Doane, coldly.

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"You and your friend are guilty of abduction. Mr. Saville was entirely within his rights. But you're going to jail now."

"But Inspector—!" Jericho protested.

"It would take hours to worm a story out of these mugs," snapped the Inspector. "We've got a lead in Kennicott. He must have a family or business associates that can help to put us on the trail."

DOANE broke the case wide open in the next ten minutes over the telephone. Orders were given over the phone for a nation-wide alarm for Mary Malcolm. The story was to be broken to the papers, with descriptions of Mary, Salazar, Herman Schott, and Major Bostwick. At the same time, Doane was informed that Senator Hiram Faucett had posted a $25,000 reward for the capture of John Malcolm's murderer.

"Things ought to hum now," said the Inspector. "Keep your tail up, Mr. Saville. We aren't licked by any means."

After Ray and Battersea had been unceremoniously dumped into a Black Maria and taken to the Tombs, the Inspector and the two members of the Hunt Club set out on the one clue that seemed to offer any possibilities.

Edward Kennicott had a wife. They found her in an apartment on the West Side, a handsome woman in her late twenties. She had already been apprised of the murder. In fact, when Doane and Saville and Jericho arrived, Inspector Clark was just leaving. Mrs. Kennicott seemed almost paralyzed by the shock of the news. So savage had been the blow that she showed almost no emotion at all. Her face was pale, but composed. There was a lifeless quality in her voice which Saville suspected was not usual.

"Come in, gentlemen," she said dully, when Clark had effected the introductions.

"I'm frightfully sorry to disturb you at this time, Mrs. Kennicott," Doane said gently. "But there is still another life at stake in this business, and we need your help."

"Then you—you know who killed Eddie?" she asked, some sort of life flashing back into her eyes. Here was a fighter, Saville thought. A woman who would go the limit to square this gruesome account.

"We know," said Doane quietly. "But we don't know why, Mrs. Kennicott," Doane said gently. "And until we know why, we will not be able to locate them."

"I'll tell you anything I can," said Mrs. Kennicott.

"Your husband was working for John Malcolm, was he?"

Mrs. Kennicott's eyes widened. "You mean this is tied up in some way with those dreadful killings in Woodstock?"

Doane nodded. "I'm afraid it is, Mrs. Kennicott. We have been given to understand that your husband had been engaged on some kind of work for Mr. Malcolm. Do you know what it is?"

She hesitated. Saville was watching her closely and he saw that it was not fear that kept her from answering at once. She was puzzled. "It was the biggest job Eddie ever had," she said. "But you'll have to believe me when I tell you that I'm very vague about it. Mr. Malcolm had sworn Eddie to secrecy. Eddie never told me anything about it, but he was terribly excited. He told me it was the biggest thing of its kind that had ever been done in this country."

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"And you have no idea what it was?" Saville asked. He felt that this woman was telling the truth. If she couldn't help them they were up against a discouraging dead end.

"Of course, it was a power dam of some sort," she said casually.

"A power dam?"

"Why—I thought you must know," she said. "That was what Eddie did. He was an expert on that sort of thing. He worked for the government on the TVA. Jerry Smythe, his partner, was a bridge expert. But Eddie took nothing but water-power jobs."

Doane looked thoughtful. "I've seen nothing in the papers to indicate that Mr. Malcolm had any such project in mind," he said.

"It was to be a secret until he was all ready to act," explained Mrs. Kennicott. "I understand that the whole thing was to have been made public in a day or two. Eddie was heartbroken when he read of Mr. Malcolm's murder. Then he was given to understand by Mr. Ray, John Malcolm's business partner, that Miss Malcolm might carry on. He told me this morning before—before he left," and her voice broke for the first time, "that he was going to see Miss Malcolm tonight."

"Do you know of any reason why anyone should want to hinder such an undertaking?" Saville asked quickly.

Mrs. Kennicott shook her head. "I don't. But then I don't know where it was to be or what its purpose was to have been, Mr. Saville. I only know it *must* have been a power dam because Eddie wasn't interested in anything else."

The telephone tinkled on the table at Mrs. Kennicott's side. As she reached for it Doane spoke quickly.

"If anybody asks you the same sort of questions that we have, Mrs. Kennicott—the papers, I mean—don't tell them what you've told us."

She nodded, and picked up the receiver. "Hello?" Then after a minute. "It's for you, Mr. Saville!"

Saville cast a quick glance at Doane. As far as he knew, no one had known that they were coming here. He picked up the telephone and answered.

"Mr. Saville?"

Saville's hand tightened on the receiver. He recognized that voice—would never forget it. "Yes, Mr. Salazar," he said, quietly.

"Sorry to disturb you at such an important conference," drawled Salazar, "but I have some advice for you." As he listened, Saville made a frantic gesture to Doane to have the call traced. Doane sprang up and raced out of the apartment.

"I'm listening," said Saville coldly.

"If you ever hope to see Mary Malcolm alive and well again," said Salazar, "tell Doane to call off his dogs. You and your friends go back to your house on Park Avenue and stay there until she is released. You will be watched. If you leave the house it will be construed as a gesture of—shall I say, antagonism?"

"Listen to me, Salazar," rapped Saville. "If you—"

"I have no time to listen," returned Salazar curtly. "I'm telling you what you must do. If Miss Malcolm can be made to see the light of reason, she will be released unharmed. But Doane must call off his cops, and you and your friends must go home and sit tight. You may not know it, but Mr. Hallam has just arrived at Park Avenue, having been driven down from Woodstock. I tell you this so that you will realize that we are keeping close tabs on you. Go home and

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stay there. Don't move out of your house. Is that clear?"

"I hear what you're saying," said Saville.

"Then, goodbye, Mr. Saville."

CHAPTER XVIII

Check-Up

INSPECTOR DOANE clamped his teeth savagely over the stem of his pipe. He was pacing up and down on the thick Persian carpet in Geoffrey Saville's library. Saville, white and drawn, sat at his desk, scribbling aimlessly on a pad in front of him. Arthur Hallam was in a big easy chair, his feet in felt bedroom slippers resting on a hassock, his hands incased in bandages. Jericho stood by one of the windows. He had drawn back a curtain.

"Two of 'em," he said, "walking up and down out there like a couple of sentries. For two cents I'd go out there and knock their heads together."

"I confess they've got me bluffed," said Doane. "After all, Miss Malcolm's safety is our chief concern at the moment. They mean business, these people. The only thing to do is to sit tight, follow instructions, and hope for the best."

"And go mad!" said Saville, in a hollow voice.

Arthur Hallam was smoking one of his imported Egyptian cigarettes, holding it clumsily between the bandaged fingers of his right hand. "There are ways to get out of this house, Inspector," he said calmly, "without those sentries or fifty sentries, if they have that many, ever knowing it. You may recall we once walked out on you in the old days."

Doane remembered with a grunt.

"But if Salazar is going to call up here once an hour and insist on speaking to all three of us, as he has for the last two hours, it won't do us much good," said Jericho. "When I get my hands on that guy. . . ."

"Don't worry too much about those checking phone calls," said Hallam, easily. "The next time he calls I'll show you how to get around that. The point is—and we might as well face it—where would you go and what would you do if you did get out?"

"Somewhere in this mess are some bits of evidence that *must* fit together," said the Inspector.

"Well, what evidence have we got?" said Hallam, blowing a pale spiral of smoke ceilingward. "We know who is guilty of the actual dirty work . . . Salazar and his two little friends. Personally, after due deliberation, I'm inclined to believe that Ray and Battersea are just what they say they are. They tried, in their own way, to save Mary from danger by hiding her. They were too stupid to know that we could be trusted. And they were too frightened to tell us or the police what we have to know. In a way I don't blame 'em. Five killings are enough to scare anybody off, and according to Ray he has actually received threats."

"You're doing a lot of talking," said Jericho irritably, "but you seem to be getting nowhere rapidly."

"Patience, my dear fellow," drawled Hallam. "Now we know that Mr. John Malcolm proposed building a power dam somewhere. Let's assume for the moment that this power dam is the key to the business. Who would go to such lengths to prevent it being built? And why?"

"Electric light companies in the locality where he planned to build his dam, assuming he could sell power cheaper than they can," suggested Jericho.

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"Electric light companies are pretty impersonal," commented Doane, with a dry smile. "They might fight Malcolm in the courts. They wouldn't hire killers to murder him."

"Precisely, Inspector. There's something a hell of a sight bigger in this than a rate war," said Hallam. "Now what can a big water power plant be used for? During the War the government manufactured nitrates at Muscle Shoals for use in making gunpowder."

"It is also the chief ingredient in fertilizer, if I remember my physics," said Doane. "That Muscle Shoals business is a funny racket. Here's the biggest power plant in the world standing idle because the government can't operate it without competing with private business, and they can't sell it without deliberately handing to one company the control of the nitrate supply. And there's a gang in Washington who have the most successful lobby there, who prevent anything from being done about it. They have a grip on the fertilizer business in peace time, and the gunpowder business in time of war, and they charge what they like for it—robbing the farmers and making the government pay through the nose. Import their nitrate from Chile, where there are natural deposits of it."

"Chile!" said Hallam, in a sharp, high pitched voice. "Chile!"

Doane looked at him curiously. "Sure. Nitrate can be manufactured out of the air, or it can be mined—principally in Chile. What's so odd about that?"

Hallam's eyes were very bright. "Salazar is a South American," he said. "I couldn't place just what country he came from. Chile's the answer."

NOBODY spoke for a moment. Saville was looking at the fat man, a feverish light in his eyes. "Maybe we've hit on something," he said. "Suppose Malcolm had meant to build a power plant to buck the nitrate ring. They'd fight, wouldn't they? They'd fight to save their racket, and they'd fight to save being exposed publicly as an outfit that had been racketeering a nation."

"I wouldn't pin too much hope on that theory, Saville. There are a lot of well-known men tied up in that lobby," said Doane.

"That doesn't mean they wouldn't hire under-cover workers like Salazar! Who are some of these big shots?"

"Offhand I couldn't tell you," said Doane, "except for the man who has been their spokesman in the Senate. A Western Senator named Hiram Faucett is the one who—"

"*Faucett!*" Saville shouted. "The one who has posted the reward for Malcolm's murderer?"

Doane slapped his thigh. "Mr. Saville, of course! It's the same man. Holy Toledo!" The inspector's gray eyes were bright as steel buttons. "You may have stumbled on the whole business! Faucett! He was one of the first on deck at Woodstock, wasn't he?"

"And terribly anxious to know whether I meant to take a hand in the investigation," said Saville. "Twenty-five thousand dollars! The whole thing is a colossal bluff."

"Go out and get him, Inspector!" Jericho snapped.

"On what charge, Mr. Jericho? On what evidence?" asked Doane. "We've been playing a guessing game here, and we may have guessed right. But we can't prove it."

"We can't prove it yet," said

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Saville. "But we will prove it. I'll get the dope on that oily, double-crossing butcher if it takes—" The telephone rang shrilly, interrupting him.

Saville picked up the phone, tight-lipped. The hated voice of Max Salazar came over the wire. "My sentries tell me that you and your friends haven't left the house, Mr. Saville. This is just a check. I should like to speak to Mr. Jericho and Mr. Hallam."

Saville's eyes were blazing. "You, John!" he rapped at Jericho.

Hallam made a sharp hissing noise between his teeth. He gestured to Saville for the phone. Saville handed it to him.

"Hello, you louse," said Hallam, in a voice that was a startling imitation of Jericho's. "Does this satisfy you?"

"Quite thoroughly, Mr. Jericho," drawled Salazar. "And now if you will put my friend Mr. Hallam on the wire . . ."

Hallam hesitated a moment and then spoke in his natural voice. "You must be terribly frightened, Salazar, to keep us bottled up this way," he said.

"Not frightened, Mr. Hallam. Just cautious," said Salazar. "I shall call you again when it seems advisable. Goodbye."

Hallam hung up the receiver and handed the phone back to Saville. His eyes were twinkling for a moment behind his steel rimmed spectacles. Then they hardened.

"Well, Geoffrey, what's keeping you?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIX

Ultimatum

THERE comes a time in everybody's life when the metal of which he is made is put to the test. Such a time had come to Mary Malcolm. For three days she had been living in a nightmare of ghoulish horror. For three days, fear had clutched at her heart painfully, fiercely. Grief had crowded in on this, grief for the father whom she had loved so very much.

From the moment at the Woodstock Artists Carnival when she had suddenly felt Battersea's cold fingers on her arm and looked into his white trembling face, horror had pervaded her. Battersea had taken her away from the crowd she was with and told her in a shaking voice that her father had been murdered. He had persuaded her in a few short sentences that it was unsafe for her to go home till the murderer was trapped—that Orville Ray had provided a hiding place for her in the city.

She had looked desperately for Geoffrey on the grounds, but Battersea had finally dragged her away to a car where Malcolm's confidential chauffeur, a man who had been in their service for fifteen years, was waiting to drive her away. She had followed Battersea's instructions blindly because she knew her father trusted him—and trusted Orville Ray.

There had followed two days and nights of imprisonment—for that's what it amounted to, though she was supplied with everything she wanted—in the apartment on West End Avenue. She had tried to persuade Ray to get hold of Saville and confide in him when she learned from her father's partner the reason for the murder. But Ray was trusting no one.

"You can trust no one," he told her. "If there is the slightest leak as to your whereabouts, you may be killed. Until the murderers are caught and we can expose the reason for the crime, your life isn't worth a thin dime."

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She had agreed not to communicate with anyone, but after a day she could stand it no longer, and had chosen a moment when the man servant who was guarding her was out of the room to put in a call for Saville. In the middle of her conversation with him, and before she could tell him where she was, he had been cut off. Ray's voice, angry, fearful, had come to her.

"You promised, Mary! This is terribly dangerous!"

And then he had arranged that no calls should be transferred to or from the apartment from the switchboard below unless they came from him. Then he had arranged for Edward Kennicott to come and see her. Kennicott was to explain to her the details of the scheme which had cost her father his life—a scheme which was now hers to carry on once the decks were cleared. Kennicott had come—and in his wake horror that shook her to her very soul.

The apartment door had been smashed in. Three men had appeared, one of them armed with a rapid-fire gun. One of the others had snatched her away and the one with the gun had opened fire on Kennicott and the servant. She had screamed and fainted—fainted for the first time in her life.

When she had recovered, she found herself in a dark room. She was lying on a bed. Beyond the door, around which she could see a crack of light, she heard the voices of men. She lay still, not daring to move because she was so frightened. And then morning came, and she could hear traffic on the street below. She must still be in the city. She got up quietly and went to the windows. But there were steel shutters closed over them on the inside which she could not operate. *Steel shutters!* This went with killers and rapid-fire guns.

A little after that, the door of her room was unlocked and opened and a man came in with a tray of breakfast for her. He was a bullet-headed man with closely cropped blond hair and a nasty, smirking smile. It was the man who had mowed down Kennicott and the other on West End Avenue.

"You feeling better?" he asked.

Mary summoned all her courage. "Why have you brought me here?" she demanded. "What do you want?"

"You'll find out quick enough," he said, with an unpleasant chuckle.

"Are you going to kill me?" she asked, steadily.

"Maybe," said Herman Schott. "You'll find out."

SOMEHOW she managed to drink some coffee. And then the agony of waiting commenced over again. At last the door of her room was unlocked once more and another man came in—tall, slender, dark, with very sharp black eyes, and a very broad, white-toothed smile. He held a long, thin cigar in his tapering fingers.

"I trust you don't object to cigar smoke, Miss Malcolm?" he asked suavely.

She shook her head. This man was dangerous. The most dangerous man she had ever seen. There was cruelty in the eyes, in the thin, curling lips.

"For the moment I am known as Mr. Salazar," he explained coolly. "It may facilitate our conversation if you know how to address me." He sat down in a chair opposite Mary and flicked the ash from his cigar. "You know, Miss Malcolm, I really feel sorry for you. The tragedy of your father's death—the rather dreadful scene you were forced to witness last night. I

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congratulate you on your courage. Most women would have been weeping and hysterical!"

"What is it you want?" she asked, keeping her voice as steady as possible.

"Perhaps you don't quite understand the situation," Salazar said.

"I think I do," said Mary Malcolm, surprised at the assurance in her voice. "My father was planning a big power project which would have put him into competition with interests you represent, Mr. Salazar. So you killed my father. He had kept his plans so well guarded that you killed an innocent girl who had done some work for him after you had failed to extract information from her. You killed Mr. Kennicott because he knew about the plans. No doubt you have destroyed the plans, which will mean endless delay in starting the work. Now you mean to kill me, as the next in line to carry on."

"It's a very difficult situation," said Salazar, almost plaintively. "You see, we have looked into your father's will. If you are not alive to inherit, your father's money goes to worthy charities . . . hospitals, colleges, museums. You must see that our simplest course is simply to remove you."

Mary was fighting to keep her lips from trembling. "Then why are you delaying?"

Salazar smiled blandly. "Only because your murder might cause us a great deal of trouble, Miss Malcolm. And there is a way out. If you will sign over to us the site on which this power project was to have been erected —to be more correct, if you will *sell* us the land—we will let you go free.'"

"I don't understand," Mary said. "You know the moment I was free I should make public the fact that I had been forced by threats of violence to sell."

"Oh, it would be awkward in a way. But nobody would be able to trace the gentlemen to whom you'd sold. And since you had accepted money for the deal I think it would hold water. You see, we do not want to use this property, Miss Malcolm. We want to prevent its use. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite."

"Your father spent several years locating the one spot where sufficient power could be created to make him a serious competitor. If we prevent the use of that spot, we have accomplished our end. Your father wouldn't sell, Miss Malcolm, and he is dead. I trust you will be more reasonable. What do you say?"

Mary Malcolm drew a deep breath. "I say no," she said, in a tight voice.

Mr. Salazar sighed. "I admire your courage, Miss Malcolm—but not your judgment. I think I have stated the issues pretty clearly. Possibly, if you reflect on them you may change your mind."

And then, for an instant, Mary Malcolm cracked. "I'm not going to change my mind! Why don't you get it over with!"

Mr. Salazar stood up. "I shall be back in an hour, Miss Malcolm. I have made no threats for the bare effect. They will be carried out. It could all be simplified a great deal if you could see the light. I hope you will. So, for the time being, *au revoir*."

CHAPTER XX

Trapped!

SENATOR FAUCETT rubbed his pudgy hands together and looked around the table. Four men sat there, hard-faced men who looked at him very intently. One of them, dark-complexioned, with a pointed beard and

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a carefully waxed mustache, looked like a Frenchman—or a South American; the other three, obviously men of wealth, could have been Americans. The Senator smiled.

"I think it is safe to report to you gentlemen that the unpleasantness in which we have been involved is about at an end. Today I have come into possession of the plans for the plant John Malcolm proposed building. The man who drew up these plans is dead. Any possibility of immediate action is out of the question. A new engineer would have to be called in. It would take months. But best of all, gentlemen, I think I can assure you that within the next hour or so you will own the Kremborg property in Alabama . . . the site of the proposed plant."

"Own?" one of the men asked.

"Precisely. At the moment, my agents are working to persuade—" and the senator smiled a crooked little smile —"to persuade Miss Malcolm to sell. It is unfortunate that you will have to pay a pretty steep price for the property; but then you are willing, I trust, to end this danger permanently."

"How much?" snapped the South American.

"Five hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars," said Faucett calmly. The men at the table looked at each other—started to mutter. "Just a minute, gentlemen," said the Senator. "John Malcolm paid a cool half million for that property. For Miss Malcolm to sell she must make a profit—to make it look right. She may do a great deal of squawking if she is released, and the financial part of the deal must look reasonable."

"But I thought," said the South American, tugging at his beard, "that if Miss Malcolm were to—er—die, that Malcolm's estate, which would include this property, went to charity. Would it not be better to—er—see to it that the money is disposed of in that fashion? Then we need not make this enormous expenditure to purchase the property."

"You're right about Malcolm's will," said the Senator. "But I'm afraid we all overlooked one point at our last meeting. Miss Malcolm *has* inherited. Though she has disappeared, as it were, there are too many people who can testify to the fact that she was alive after her father's death. So, you see, she *has* inherited. And we have been unable to determine whether or not Miss Malcolm has made a will. She had some property of her own before her father's death and may very well have willed it. The hitch is that we don't know the provisions of that will. To be on the safe side, Miss Malcolm must be persuaded to sell—*will* be persuaded to sell—and we must pay a price for the land that will make the deal look legitimate."

"When do you anticipate the deal will be closed?" one of the men asked.

"Perhaps it is already closed," said Faucett. "I will telephone my agent now."

The room in which this conference was held was the inner sitting room of the most expensive suite at the Hotel Calvin on lower Fifth Avenue. Senator Faucett kept this suite on a yearly basis as he always had a great deal of business to transact in New York. He picked up the telephone and when the switchboard operator answered he gave her a number—the number which would connect him with Max Salazar's hideout.

"You'll call me back when you get it?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Yes, Senator."

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A MOMENT later the phone tinkled and Senator Faucett picked it up. Salazar was on the wire.

"The girl has plenty of spirit, Senator," he said. "She may not give in as easily as we hoped. But of course I have my ace in the hole."

"What's that?"

"Geoffrey Saville," said Mr. Salazar with a chuckle. "She's in love with him, you know. And Mr. Saville is behaving like a lamb, Senator. Following my instructions to the last word, believing it's Miss Malcolm's only chance. If necessary I will bring him here and I think Miss Malcolm may weaken when she sees our methods with him."

"Time is important," said Faucett, anxiously. "The directorate is most anxious to close the affair."

"Patience, Senator, patience," said Max Salazar. "The job is as good as accomplished. It may take a day longer—but it is certain. We are holding all the aces. I suggest you reconvene at dinner time tonight. I shall have some sort of word for you then."

"Very good," said the Senator. He replaced the receiver on the hook and explained to the other four what had transpired.

"Then there is nothing to do but wait," said the South American, rising. "We will meet here after dinner, gentlemen?"

It was agreed. The South American walked to the door of the room and started to go out. The door was locked. He turned to Faucett.

"Unlock the door, Senator."

"Unlock it! It isn't locked," said Faucett. "That's only an inside door leading to the foyer."

"You must have locked it without thinking," said the South American.

"But I didn't!" Faucett came across to the door. There was no question about its being locked. He went through his pockets for the key, wondering if he *had* locked it without thinking. He knew that he hadn't—yet he looked. The South American shook the handle. It was a solid door, a very solid door, set tightly in metal weatherstripping which was part of the sound-proofing process. The door didn't budge. It didn't budge when Faucett jammed his shoulder against it.

"Some fool chambermaid must have locked it from the outside," he rasped, irritated. "I'll phone downstairs and have the office send up a pass key." He crossed back to the phone and picked up the receiver. The line was dead. The operator didn't come on despite his frantic jiggling.

"What the hell?" Faucett called sharply. "They don't answer. What's going on here, anyhow?"

They were all crowded around the door now. The Senator felt little beads of sweat on his forehead. Someone had deliberately locked them in and tampered with their phone. Almost hysterically, he jammed his shoulder against the door again. The door gave nothing at all. The five men stood looking at each other.

"Hammer on the walls!" suggested the South American. "Someone in the next apartment is sure to hear us."

"Sound-proof," explained the Senator, dully.

The South American, his black eyes round with sudden panic, swept across to the window and opened it. Twenty-six floors to the street. Nothing but blocks and blocks of bare roof tops beyond. The man yelled . . . yelled at the top of his lungs, and the wind beat the sound of his voice back into his face.

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Trapped! All five of them, until somebody chose to come and set them free!

CHAPTER XXI

Nothing for Publication

THE telephone at Arthur Hallam's elbow rang insistently. The fat man sat motionless, for a moment or two, his eyes unblinking behind the steel-rimmed spectacles. Presently he reached out for the phone and answered. Max Salazar's voice came over the wire.

"Will you fetch Mr. Saville to the phone, please, Mr. Hallam," he said, in his calm, insolent voice.

Hallam covered the mouthpiece of the phone with one bandaged hand, hesitated a moment, and then called "Geoffrey! Telephone!" After another pause he picked up the phone again.

"Well? he said, in a perfect imitation of Saville's sharp, incisive tone.

"You can be of help to Miss Malcolm and to yourself, Mr. Saville," said Salazar. "It is now ten minutes to one. At exactly one-thirty you will be on the corner of Fifty-second Street and Madison Avenue . . . the northeast corner. A car will pick you up and take you to Miss Malcolm. Do you understand the instructions?"

"I think so," said Hallam, in Saville's voice. "Why should I follow them?"

"You are still interested in seeing Miss Malcolm come out of this affair alive and well?"

"Naturally."

"Then you will follow instructions. You will come unarmed. And you will impress upon your friends the absolute necessity of remaining where they are. Is it all quite clear?"

"Quite."

"Then we shall have the pleasure of talking together face to face very shortly," drawled Salazar.

Hallam replaced the telephone on the table and sat where he was, staring straight ahead of him, a cigarette burning lazily between his bandaged fingers. He sat like that for a long time. Presently he turned his head toward the door, expectantly. There was the sound of footsteps in some distant portion of the house. A moment later the door opened and Saville, a light of excitement burning in his eyes, came into the room.

"Anything stirring, Arthur?" he asked.

"Plenty," said Hallam. He detailed the conversation with Salazar.

"I was expecting such a call," said Saville. "That's why I came back. The gag worked. Doane wangled it with the telephone girl at the Calvin. We listened in on the Senator's wire. He finally called Salazar. Doane and Jericho are tracing the number. I came back here because I knew Salazar was going to send for me." Saville's lips twisted into a tight smile. "He's trying to force Mary to sell the land on which this plant was to have been built. She's refused. They have a notion that if they give me the works in front of her she may give in."

"And you're going?" Hallam asked quietly.

"Certainly."

"Unarmed?"

"Yes."

Years of experience with Saville had taught Hallam the futility of argument. But he said: "You're nuts!"

"Maybe," said Saville. "Mary's in this place. We can't attack them or shoot it out with them until we know it's safe. I'll be on the inside and can take care of her."

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A faint shudder shook Hallam's shoulders. He glanced down at the bandages that enveloped his hands. "You'll do precious little helping of anyone, Geoffrey, if they *do* go to work on you," he said harshly. "I know. They don't play nicely."

"I'll have to risk it," said Saville.

"What about Faucett?" asked Hallam, after a pause.

"Faucett has probably had a stroke by now," Saville said, with a mirthless chuckle. "We locked him and his friends in their consultation chamber, and disconnected their phone. They're going to stay there until we can put the bee on them."

Saville took off his suit coat. There was a shoulder holster strapped under his left arm and he unfastened it and laid the gun and the holster on the table. Hallam watched him, somber-eyed.

"Geoffrey, I've never interfered with you, but this is crazy," he said suddenly. "You're banking on John and the Inspector turning up, like the Marines, at the crucial moment. It's no good, Geoffrey. These guys don't fool. The minute they realize they've been trapped the first thing they'll do is polish off you and Mary. We have a way of getting out of this place that they don't know about. They probably have a way of getting out of their place."

Saville grinned reassuringly. "Don't be a sissy, Arthur," he said.

But Hallam had no answering smile. "I'm not," he said gravely. "But I spent a day with Mr. Salazar, Geoffrey—a day I shall never forget as long as I live."

Saville's face darkened. "I shan't forget that day either, Arthur, when the moment of reckoning comes!" he said harshly. He glanced at his watch. "Well, I must be off if I'm to keep this appointment."

Hallam was looking intently at the end of his cigarette. "Luck!" he said.

SAVILLE'S muscles were tense, his nerves keyed to a tautness he had never felt, as he waited on the curb at Fifty-second and Madison for Salazar's car to arrive. He expected almost anything but what actually came. He had been watching for a limousine with drawn blinds. Instead a little sports roadster drew up at the curb. The man behind the wheel was Major Bostwick. Saville recognized him from Hallam's description—and his right arm showed the end of a bandage. That would be to cover the wound which Saville himself had inflicted during the battle at the McAndrew place in Woodstock.

"Ready, Mr. Saville?" the Major asked, casually.

Saville opened the car door and stepped in beside the man. The Major threw the car into gear and drove away in silence. Saville felt that there was something far more sinister about this open journey than he had expected.

"You're taking me to your hideout in this open fashion?" he asked.

Bostwick nodded. "Always like driving with the top down, myself," he said conversationally.

"But doesn't that seem rather dangerous—I mean, letting me know exactly where this place is?"

Bostwick cast him a quick, amused glance. "We won't need a hideout when we're finished with you, Mr. Saville. Our job will be done."

"Of course," said Saville softly, "you know that you'll all hang for this business sooner or later."

"If I thought so," said Bostwick, dryly, "I'd be a good many thousand

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miles from here right now. But here we are, Mr. Saville. You see, we aren't located so far from you after all."

They hadn't come more than eight blocks. It was a brownstone house east of Lexington Avenue. An innocent-looking brownstone house, with lace curtains at the windows. Bostwick parked the car casually in front of the house and got out.

"Follow me, Mr. Saville," he said.

They walked up the steps to the front door and Bostwick just stood there without ringing the bell. Presently the door opened. There was no one in sight. Bostwick made an ironic little gesture of courtesy, inviting Saville to precede him. The moment he was in the hall Saville felt a gun jammed in his ribs. He had expected it and was not surprised. Expert hands went quickly over his clothes in search of a weapon. Then the gun was withdrawn from his ribs and he turned to see the bullet-headed Herman Schott.

"Upstairs!" Schott said, gesturing with his gun.

It was very dark in the house and Saville saw the reason why as he came to the landing. There was a window there—a window he had seen from the street. But there were no lace curtains visible on the inside. Only the smooth surface of the steel shutters which barred it. Saville's heart began to pound against his ribs as they reached the top of the stair. Mary was here somewhere. He would see her in a moment. After that—well, after that they'd have to trust in divine luck.

A door at the end of the hall opened and Max Salazar stepped out, the inevitable long, thin cigar between his strong, white teeth.

"It's a pleasure to see you, Mr. Saville," he drawled. "Our last meeting was a little strained. You masquerading as friend of Ray; I as his man servant. And that was a very clever dodge you pulled on me about the desk in the bedroom. Very clever indeed. And your trailing me to Woodstock. Had us in a nasty spot there for a moment or two. It's been an interesting and exciting affair, don't you think?"

"Where's Miss Malcolm?" said Saville, harshly.

"Just in here," said Salazar, "and most anxious to see you, I'm sure."

Saville strode past him into the room. Mary, white and drawn, was there. At sight of Saville, a little choking cry escaped her and she flew into his arms and clung to him. Her nerve seemed to go at the sight of the man she loved, and for a moment she was shaken with dry, racking sobs. Saville held her very close in his arms.

"Chin up, darling," he whispered. "We'll see this through, somehow."

"You shouldn't have come, Geoffrey. You shouldn't have come," she murmured. "I—I could have gone through it better alone."

THEN Saville saw Salazar over Mary's shoulder, smiling a twisted little smile of satisfaction. Very gently, Saville disengaged Mary's embrace.

"This is Salazar's show," he said, "perhaps we'd better let him run it."

Mary turned. She was clinging very tightly to Saville's hand, but she seemed to have got her nerve back.

"This can all be cleared up very quickly," said Salazar. "We are trying to persuade Miss Malcolm to sell us a piece of property she has inherited from her father. We are offering her five hundred and seventy-five thousand

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dollars for it. Her father paid an even five hundred thousand. She will make a profit on the deal, and this whole affair can come to an end. I have brought you here, Mr. Saville, to have you throw your weight into the balance, to advise Miss Malcolm to close the deal."

"This, I take it, is the site on which the power plant is to be built?" said Saville.

Salazar's eyes narrowed. "So you know?"

Saville nodded. He turned to Mary Malcolm. "You have refused?"

"Father died for this!" the girl said, her eyes flashing. It was all she needed to say. "Would you have me sell it, Geoffrey?"

"No," said Saville quietly.

Salazar shook his head. "I had counted on you to exhibit more sense."

"Let's not stall, Salazar. You had counted on no such thing. You brought me here because you intend to torture me in front of Miss Malcolm. You expect that will break her down. I know, because I was listening in on your conversation with Senator Faucett!"

"Listening in?" Salazar's eyes narrowed.

"At the switchboard at the Calvin," he went on. "There are ways of getting out of my house, Salazar, that no sentries can watch."

"And my phone calls?" asked Salazar quietly.

"Mr. Hallam is an excellent mimic," said Saville. "Now here's the situation as it really is, Salazar. This house is surrounded at the moment by police. You haven't got a chance of getting away. The game's up."

Not a muscle of Salazar's face moved. "Check on that, Major," he said calmly. "Herman, stay where you are. Keep these two covered." Then he looked at Saville. "Keep talking, Mr. Saville."

"Faucett and the directors of the nitrate ring are prisoners at the Calvin. You're through, Salazar. Washed up."

Bostwick was suddenly back in the room, his lips twitching. "He's right, Max. The place is swarming on all sides with cops."

Salazar's teeth were bared in a savage grin. "I'm a vindictive sort of person, Saville. My mother used to remark on it. 'Max,' she used to say, 'you're a grudge-bearer!' Now take this situation. You've pulled a very fast one on us, Mr. Saville, and I suddenly have a grudge against you."

"Why don't you drop the melodrama, Salazar, and admit defeat?" Saville rapped.

"Because we are not defeated," said Salazar coolly. "Your copper friends can't get in. We have steel shutters that fasten over all the doors and windows. We would be able to hold out here for weeks."

"It's a stalemate," said Saville. "Why don't you resign, Salazar? Suppose you can hold out for days—even weeks? In the end they'll starve you out."

"Oh, we're going out," drawled Salazar. "We're going out now. All of us. You and Miss Malcolm are going first, and I am coming just behind you with a gun in each of your backs. Herman and the Major will bring up the rear. We will get into our car and we will go away from here, Mr. Saville. And when we are well away then you will see what I mean about holding a grudge." Suddenly all pretense at suavity left him. "March—both of you!" he snarled.

"I'm not walking out in front of you," said Mary Malcolm, quietly.

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"NO?" Salazar took a quick step forward. Before Saville realized what had happened Salazar had smashed him squarely in the mouth with his right fist. Saville staggered back, to find himself clutched by a pair of arms stronger than anything he had ever felt. Salazar came toward him. Saville was helpless as a child in Herman Schott's embrace. Salazar seemed suddenly in a frothing frenzy.

"So you won't walk out in front, Miss Malcolm? Then stay here and watch this!" He hurled himself at Saville, beating at him with his fists, kicking him, slashing at his cheeks with sharp nails. And Saville, twist and try as he would, was held as tightly as if he were imprisoned in bands of steel. Blood trickled down his face and from his mouth. Salazar was like an animal, tearing at him—slashing him to ribbons with his claws. And suddenly Mary screamed.

"Stop! Stop! I'll go!"

"Then go!" rapped Salazar.

Saville's knees were like rubber hose under him as Herman Schott forced him out into the hall. Never had he been subjected to anything so fierce, so savage as that attack. All the cruelty that was under Salazar's veneer had burst out in one moment of frenzy.

It was a strange parade down to the front door. Saville, his face a crimson havoc, and Mary, clutching his arm, white, choking; Salazar was directly behind them, so close Saville could feel his hot breath on the back of his neck, covering them with an automatic. Behind Salazar were Herman Schott and Bostwick, both armed.

"We go out the front door," said Salazar harshly. "You'll stop the minute you are in view of the men on the street and let me do the talking. Herman! You open the front door."

Schott slipped forward and opened the door. Then he dropped back.

"Now!" hissed Salazar. "Walk out onto the step."

Slowly Saville and Mary went forward. As they reached the top step, men seemed suddenly to swarm out from buildings across the way. Cops in uniform—plainclothes men—and in the very front rank, Doane and Jericho.

"Stop where you are!" Salazar shouted. "And listen! I have these two prisoners covered. I have guns in their backs. We're going to that car and away in it. If there is one shot fired at me, or anyone else in this party, I pull the triggers. I couldn't miss, Mr. Police Inspector, even if you plugged me."

"You can't get away with this, Salazar," said Doane quietly.

"I am getting away with it," said Salazar. "Remember! One shot and it's the works for these two. Now, Mr. Saville, march!"

Jericho, his face twisted with rage, was swearing horribly.

"You yellow rats! Why don't you shoot it out with us? Where's your back-breaking murderer? Let him loose here and I'll treat him to a dose of his own medicine! What's the matter, Salazar? Afraid to face it out alone?"

"Keep going," was all that Salazar said.

Suddenly Saville began to tremble. Mary Malcolm looked quickly at him as she felt his whole body shaking. Saville had seen something. Something he scarcely dared believe. His hand closed over Mary's wrist. His lips moved. It might have been a prayer. Suddenly, almost in his ear, came a scream—a horrible choking scream. At the same instant, Saville wrenched

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Mary Malcolm's arm and sent her spinning headlong into the gutter. There was a shot—a shot that nearly burst Saville's ear drum—and a hot, stabbing pain in his shoulder. He stumbled down on his knees. At the same instant there was a sound like the outbreak of an artillery attack.

Salazar was on his knees, hands groping at his throat. Herman Schott and Bostwick were already down, riddled by police bullets. But no one seemed to have moved against Salazar, Salazar who struggled and writhed and then fell forward on the pavement.

"Sweet mother!" said Doane, in an awed voice, as he knelt over Salazar. "Slit his throat just as clean as a whistle." His fingers were on the handle of a murderous looking knife that had spelled finish for Mr. Salazar.

And as Saville struggled to his feet there was suddenly a hand under his arm and he looked down into the impassive face of Wu, the little Chinese. "Unfortunately out of practice," Wu said sadly. "There is nerve in side of neck which, when severed, completely paralyzes. My clumsy handling of knife resulted in his being able to shoot. A million pardons, Honorable One."

"YOU can't arrest me!" blustered Senator Hiram Faucett. "On what charge, may I ask?"

"First-degree murder!" said Inspector Doane firmly, as he snapped a pair of bracelets over the Senator's wrists. "The murders of John Malcolm, Marian Twig, Edward Kennicott, one watchman, and Orville Ray's servant. Is that specific enough, Senator?"

"But that's preposterous! I have alibis for . . ."

"Stow it, Senator," said Doane. "Have you an alibi for the stenographic reproduction of a conversation you had over the telephone with the late Mr. Salazar from this room, just before you were locked in? Accessories burn just as well as the guy who pulls the trigger, Senator. You and your directorate are going to visit the chair, one after another!"

THE reporters' pencils were poised. Mary Malcolm cleared her throat. She was sitting on the lounge in Saville's library and Saville himself looked as though his face had come into intimate contact with a barbed-wire entanglement.

"This nitrate ring," said Mary Malcolm, "had been milking the American farmers dry by charging exorbitant prices for fertilizer. They also had a corner on the munitions business of the country. Our government would have been helpless in time of war without their imported nitrates and potash." The reporters' pencils were racing over paper. "My father determined to buck them by building a power plant for manufacturing nitrates at a cost that would take a burden off the farmer's shoulders and provide our national defense with a cheap supply of materials for making ammunition. The nitrate ring stood to lose billions if he went through with his project. That, ladies and gentlemen, was the motive for the murders."

"Do you intend to go ahead with the project, Miss Malcolm?" a reporter asked.

"Positively!" said Mary Malcolm.

"Have you any other plans for the future, Miss Malcolm?"

Mary Malcolm looked wistfully at Saville. "I'm not sure," she said. "Certainly nothing for publication."

THE END

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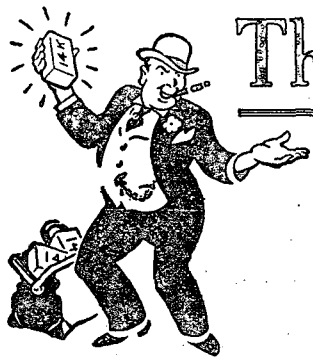

They're Swindling You!

For the Ladies

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the fifty-second of a series of exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

"NELLIE, THE IRISH GIRL," as she signs herself, who is employed in a Detroit beauty parlor, sends me a letter in which she emphasizes a foible of her sex — the eternal hunt for bargains. Nellie quotes the patter of house-to-house canvassers who are employed to distribute so-called *free* permanent wave certificates. She says:

"Mrs. Blue, you are the proud winner of a five-dollar permanent wave. Here is your certificate. All it will cost you is twenty-five cents. Call at once to make your appointment. We have selected from the city directory a number of women in each neighborhod to introduce these marvelous new waves. Thank you." And on the canvasser goes to the next house.

She continues, "A sharp concern buys old equipment, hires operators just out of school at as cheap a rate as possible and sells certificates broadcast. Women spend all day waiting around, hungry, tired out, and their hair destroyed by cheap solutions, imperfect winding and used pads. Neighborhood shops are licensed (This is not true in some states.—F. W.), state-controlled, sanitary and reasonable, but the thrill of something for nothing fools them all. Barnum was right.

"Here is what a woman spends for a *free* permanent, although these prices vary in shops in different cities:

Certificate	$.25
Telephone for appointment	.05
Carfare (at least)	.10
Haircut	.50
Shampoo	.25
Finger wave	.25
Total	1.40

"One forty per person all day long. Cheap labor, cheap machines, filthy pads—and no comeback."

Now I've known of that permanent wave racket for years. It has been, and is being worked in practically every large city of the country, and

"I am glad to endorse the program of *Detective Fiction Weekly* which will bring to its readers the truth about rackets and racketeers. No man can be swindled if he knows in advance what the swindler is going to do—and nobody *wants* to be swindled."—Edward L. Greene, General Manager of the National Better Business Bureau.

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many of the firms who have used it have been prosecuted for misleading advertising. In New York, and some other cities, the charge for the certificates is fifty, and not twenty-five cents. The charges for the haircut, shampoo, and finger wave are correspondingly higher.

But, my dear Nellie, in some instances, that's only the beginning. One concern in New York used that racket as a build-up for another. They distributed their "free certificates" high, wide and to the handsome. They gave many of them away, in fact. The money collected by the canvasser is "front money," his commission; the beauty parlor never sees a penny of that.

AFTER the New York promoters had distributed thousands of their certificates they then advertised their beauty shop for sale in the newspapers. Permanent wave addicts and prospective buyers of the business arrived simultaneously, as the promoters intended they should. The slick boys fixed up their books for the prospective buyer and, upon examination, it appeared that the business was immensely profitable. The presence of the mob of women who were looking for *free* permanents seemingly verified the figures in the doctored books.

Of course, it took no time at all to convince some former grocer's clerk or bookkeeper that here was a business that would make his fortune in short order and the promoters unloaded their property on an unsuspecting purchaser who took immediate possession of *his* bargain.

Not long ago, a man told me that he spent a month arguing with angry women who, rightly, couldn't understand why they should have to pay real money for a *free* permanent wave. The promoters had neglected to advise him about the more or less important details of how the business had been artificially stimulated.

When the women arrived with their *free* certificates, while negotiations for the sale of the place were in progress, they were quietly taken into side rooms, out of hearing of the prospective purchaser. If they failed to fall for the racket after learning what the permanent wave was to cost them they were quietly ushered out of the place without any commotion and, to the purchaser, everything was seemingly serene.

After the hubbub and excitement caused by the distribution of the *free* certificates had subsided, there wasn't any business for the new owner. Quite the reverse, instead of good-will, the shop had incurred the enmity of hundreds of women and they avoided it. The new owner's investment turned out to be a total loss. When he finally decided to do something about it and visited the district attorney's office to register his complaint, it was too late. The former owners had quit the city and were probably engaged in another build-up elsewhere.

This racket can be stopped. In Akron, Ohio, for example, the Municipal Safety Department not only refused to license salesmen to sell the *free* certificates, but when the operators defied them and were successful in placing several hundred certificates, detectives were placed at the entrance of beauty shops which used the scheme and in this fashion broke up the racket.

Coming Next Week—You Wouldn't Believe It

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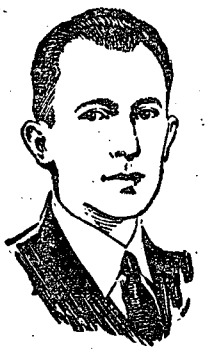
Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

OCTOGENARIAN—Mrs. Mary E. Davis, Fancy Prairie, Ill.—could now well change her cryptonym to NONAGENARIAN, if she so wished! She has just written us that on last April 6 she celebrated her ninetieth birthday! Our congratulations, Octogenarian! And many happy returns of the day! May many joys be yours! And may you be one of the first of this department's centenarians!

Octogenarian spends her time keeping house, raising flowers, tending her garden, washing and sewing—*and* solving ciphers! She sent us her first solutions in March, 1929. And at the end of June, this year, her total solving score in this department was 602 answers! Incidentally, Octogenarian is just 49 days—or 7 weeks—younger than our other nonagenarian, C. F., Charles Fuller, Baltimore, Md.

Our *Inner Circle Club*—composed of members who have individual solving scores of 1,000 or more answers—welcomed its fifty-third member in June! O. I. SEE, otherwise known as M. B. Mahaffee, Postmaster at Caroleen, N. C., became a member with the June 20 issue, when his solutions totaled exactly 1,000! Our congratulations and thanks, O. I. SEE! New *I. C. C.* members who matured in July will be listed November 7.

This department's system of handling cipher solutions gives the solver full credit for all answers submitted. One or more answers for any month will enter your name in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for that month. If your total reaches 100 by the end of the year, you are listed in our yearly *Honor Roll*. And finally, a grand total of 1,000 makes you a life member of our *Inner Circle Club*. So keep your answers coming, cryptofans!

When frequencies fail as clues, as in last week's No. 234, Larry Bee's isogrammatic message, where each symbol occurred 6 times, then the solver must depend upon position and combination for his results. Here, for example, symbol V (3 times in last 2 places) reacted as *e;* symbol A (4 times as final) suggested *y;* and symbol R (use in groups 2 and 6) responded as *l*. Using these letters, DRFFYA DAGRBA (*-l- - -y -y-l-y*) yielded *bloody byplay*. And so to FGGFPV (*oppo-e*), *oppose;* etc.

Hints to this week's ciphers: Note the triple sequence shown in the 1st and 3rd subtractions in G. J. D.'s division. This will leave but two possibilities for P × L = O, both of which will give the same value for R in P × P = R. The 10-letter key-word runs from *o* to *9*. In Scheherazade's crypt, get the phrases NE AR. APR and NPLT NPR, and then try for TLNGETH and GH. Compare GN G, NT, and PXNT in Wm. Wordy's contribution. Follow up with TXO, ZNTXO, NUGPX, etc.

Try the affixes KT- and -KTR for entry to Zadig's message. Continue with KTTVH, YAHHKXAH, and ATYV. Note symbol N used only as a final in D. E. Boliver's alliterative message. And spot your own leads in D'Artagnan's Inner Circle effort. A solution of No. 240 and the answers to all of this week's ciphers will appear next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 235—Cryptic Division. By G. J. D.

```
RHP)LHLSFT(LIP
PFIO
-------
 LEEF
 LIFI
-------
  POHT
  OTPR
-------
   LTE
```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No. 236—Hammer and Scythe. By Scheherazade.

"DLAEF GH OGHBEKRFRO NE AR NPR SFLTO BETUVRF-EF, RTFGBPGTS LTO AVGDOGTS VX TLNGETH YEFR HVFRDZ NPLT NPR XFEVORHN ALNNDRH."—*BPLTTGTS.

No. 237—"We Are Seven." By Wm. Wordy.

ZOYOX VUTNSOU RTNTUPZNZ LOXN HTU G ZFPX! TXO SPN G NOEOFSTXO FTEO, ONK.; TXO KUGZSOB PXNT G ZNTXO LGEE, ONK.; TXO NUPOB NT VOGN G NUGPX GN G KUTZZPXA, ONK.; ONK.

No. 238—Private Entrance. By Zadig.

ALVHZFKDVG GFHAOOKTR FNKHX-UOAAH YAHHKXAH PTAYP ATYV, FCKYV, FNHKYV ELAT LZTVOVX CZOO, CNKYN GKOVTFOB ALVTG, HVDVZOKTR GVYHVF LZGG-ZRVCZB, VOVDZFAH, KTTVH GZTYFES ZXKF.

No. 239—Duly Dismissed. By D. E. Boliver.

BYHGPEZAK BTFTEHN BYHGYHTE BHTFZL BYVATB. BYALPDZL BYVATB BYGXYPLEN, BSTLKXLZL BYDGETB-ZAK BYEYAZE. BYEYAZE BSTHVZL BPEGHXK. BYHGY-HTE BTLSXZHZU? BZHKTXAEN!

No. 240—Border Incidents. By D'Artagnan.

KRFRHY STRAFER ODFOV SDQ SXFO. *DAPXA VFUKNV ERVV. VMXUB VFUKNV *DAPXA. FTULZ *XGH GRIUE-UBOV *PHBDVE RW YTDCHT. JTRAGDHT YUZV!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

229—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A P I N K H O U S E

230—A cubic foot of air weighs approximately one and one-fourth ounces, just a little more than the letter which the post office carries for three cents.

231—Many city dwellers could concede their country brethren a five-mile advantage in any ten-mile gossip race only to win by four miles!

232—Beyond fertile sylvan expanse, under southward horizon, where lofty Popocatepetl lies, lie chaste Orizaba and stately Mount Ixtaccihuatl, crested with eternal snow.

233—Elucidating why hansom cab driver mounts aloft arear: since interior superior should not scan exterior anterior inferior posterior!

234—Amidst bloody byplay, shrewd gunmen battle prying bugler, whilst behind swampy, unmown growth, wrathy guards oppose limpid humbug.

Readers submitting answers to any of this week's puzzles will be credited for them in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for October. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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FLASHES from READERS

OUR good friends, the readers, have been writing in again. This week, due to the mechanics of magazine make-up, we are able to publish more and longer letters than is usually possible.

For the sake of those who have not understood, this department, FLASHES FROM READERS, is devoted entirely to letters sent by readers. We are always very glad to get them, and whenever possible, we make a point of publishing them here. Naturally, letters may be favorable or unfavorable criticism. We've noticed that three people may like a story and three others, just as intelligent, may think it's terrible.

Another thing sometimes keeps readers from writing in. They are overly modest and do not wish to see their names in print. Any reader who feels this way about it can ask that only his initials be used, or may employ a pen-name if he prefers. He can rest assured that his privacy will be respected by the editors.

We hope that this explanation will encourage many readers who have not written thus far to do so. We will welcome letters dealing with anything of interest in the magazine, from cover to cover. May we hear from you soon?

This is one of the most interesting letters we have received in many weeks.

DEAR SIR:

Sometimes I think we humans are pretty dull-witted. The reason for the present outburst is this: I've just learned to read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY out loud.

Now when I was a little shaver, out on the farm, father used to get some magazines (I think ARGOSY was one of them) and he always read them out loud at night before we kids had to pike off to the attic to go to bed.

Over the years, I had forgotten all about that, and how much fun it was, until just last week, when Junior was clamoring for the car and Mary wanted to go to the movies. They're my kids, and I guess they're no ornerier than most of the youngsters their age.

But I'm not so young any more, and I'd kind of like to see them around the house once in a while. Say one night a week.

Well, I began to look around for something to make them stay home, something to peg them down for an evening with the old folks once a week. And that's when I remembered the farm and my dad, and DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

I tried it last Wednesday, and it worked like a charm. Junior fidgetted a little at first, and so did Mary, but before I'd read more than a couple of pages, they were riveted to their chairs, drinking in every word.

I tell you, Mr. Editor, that gave me a pretty grand feeling. Here was the old man (I'm not really so old, but you know how kids are) giving

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them as much fun as they would have found outside our home.

I'm pretty grateful to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, too, and this is by way of a bread-and-butter note. As long as you go on publishing the same top-notch stories you're publishing now, I think I've found the solution to my own personal problem with the younger generation. Thank you.

WILLIAM SNYDER,
Milwaukee, Wisc.

The floor is all yours, Mr. Blake!

DEAR EDITOR:

I thought that if I waited long enough, someone would write in about your covers, and then I could take the other side and start a nice little fight. But for some reason, no one has written in, and I guess I'll have to start the fight all by myself.

Now I've been saving DFW covers for about three years, and I think I am not too bold when I say that I'm a mild authority on them. Some of them have been excellent. Some of them, to be very outspoken with you, have been pretty sour.

I think that covers are pretty important to the magazine and to the readers, and I'd like to work up a little comment here about them. Being as how I'm a guy that would just as soon lead with his chin as not, I'm asking readers for their opinions about covers. As I savvy it, this department is the place where the reader can shoot off his mouth. And if this ever gets by the editors and is published, I'll know I guessed right. How about it, Mr. Editor?

Truly,
HARVEY BLAKE,
Denver, Colorado.

An iron worker writes us a very helpful letter.

DEAR SIR:

For a number of years I've been a very steady reader of your fine magazine, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. I really enjoy every issue and especially like your articles and true stories, but: Why the deuce don't you check up on some of your authors? Every so often one of them starts getting technical about something and he makes me think of myself trying to discuss religion.

Specifically, about a year ago you ran a story about a robbery in connection with a structural iron job. Now that author had a nice idea but his knowledge of iron was as scanty as some of the beach costumes at Galveston. He hinged his story on the "fact" that iron workers never go aloft in even a light rain or when the ice is on it. Gentlemen, I've been up there with them when it was raining like that notorious cow—and not only that, but when there was ice and snow on the beams. As a matter of fact, the last two fingers of my right hand are knotted up right now from a fall I got from 110 feet up on a bitter day when the beams were ice-coated. Of course I "grabbed" and didn't fall far, but the "grabbing" left me a memento.

In the August 22 issue you have a story called "Tag Trail" in which Mr. Charles Molyneux Brown attempts to tell the world about a little fancy burning job by *Dave*. From his description, *Dave* must have been a "wiz" to get "blue, lightning-like flashes" with an oxy-acetylene burning outfit. The best I've ever been able to do is get a reddish-yellow glow from the abundant sparks and slag. (Oxide of Iron). I'm afraid Charlie got electric arc welding mixed up in his story. Moreover, the gas welder and burner always uses goggles. The boy who sports the fancy hood is the electric welder. He needs it to protect his ugly mug from ray-burns caused by the ultra-violet and infra-red rays emanating from the electric arc.

Those "manila merchandising tags" are green (oxygen) or red (acetylene) and are printed "Dangerous, compressed oxygen (acetylene) gas, caution, do not drop." They have a space for the *name* and *address* of the consignee and are just plenty hard to tear from the cylinder *on purpose*.

The number is not on the tag—it is stenciled into the steel of the cylinder at the top along with the test dates.

The oxygen companies seldom pile cylinders around haphazardly. A cylinder with 2,100 pounds pressure on it is a pretty dangerous proposition and is usually treated with a lot of respect. Once in a while some dopy welder gets careless and wakes up in hell, or wherever dopy welders do wake up. A little leaflet, "Precautions and Safe Practices," gratis from Hinde Air Company, will tell Mr. Brown all about this part of it.

Really—you shouldn't take all this too seriously, as nobody ever gets anything right. They try to tell about iron and steel work. However, iron workers and welders are the most talkative of men and any author would find it easy to get all the information he wanted by just asking some bona-fide worker. We all like to sling the steer about our jobs—we are mostly dumb, don't know a thing except iron—and how we love it! We stay at it until we get too damn old to work and then dry up and die of lonesomeness for the heat and noise and hell of a big iron job. Just ask one of us next time and try to get away under an hour.

In conclusion, I really like DFW and expect I'll keep on reading it until they plant me, but why not either stick to police business or find out about what you're writing about?

Hoping you have continued and greater success,
ART BERRY,
Texas City, Texas.

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Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

Technical Tests

MEMBERS of today's police forces are required to possess a knowledge of certain fundamental laws and rules of police procedure. In the examination papers we have examined, certain questions on law are always asked. Thus it follows that a candidate for a civil service job as patrolman must be prepared to answer such questions. By reading local laws and ordinances and a text book on law he may acquire sufficient elementary knowledge to meet the test.

In the assortment of oft-asked questions below twenty samples are given.

Q 1—As defined in the penal law the word "maliciously" means (a) knowingly; (b) corruptly; (c) fraudulently; (d) with evil intent to injure another.

Q 2—A court order signed by a judge committing a defendant to jail is called (a) demurrer; (b) commitment; (c) warrant; (d) opinion.

Q 3—That which leads or tempts a person to commit crime is called (a) malice; (b) intent; (c) motive; (d) design.

Q 4—The geographical location in which is held the trial of a person accused of crime is called (a) session; (b) venue; (c) district; (d) precinct.

Q 5—The essence of a crime is known as the (a) confession; (b) complaint; (c) indictment; (d) corpus delicti.

Q 6—When testimony is required to support the testimony of a complainant or an accomplice it is called (a) corroborative; (b) parol; (c) direct; (d) circumstantial.

Q 7—When the penal law states that a child under 7 years is not capable of committing crime this is known as (a) hearsay; (b) rebuttal; (c) dictum; (d) a conclusive presumption.

Q 8—When a witness gives evidence by word of mouth it is termed (a) parol evidence; (b) hearsay; (c) direct evidence; (d) circumstantial evidence.

Q 9—A person who aids, abets or assists another in the commission of a crime is legally called (a) dupe; (b) accomplice; (c) co-defendant; (d) ringleader.

Q 10—A married person who contracts a second marriage while the first marriage is legally in force is guilty of (a) polygamy; (b) bigamy; (c) seduction; (d) embracery.

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Q 11—A person accused of murder and acquitted of it may (a) be tried again for the same crime; (b) not be tried again for the same crime.

Q 12—A person accused of crime is presumed to be (a) guilty until proven innocent; (b) innocent until proven guilty; (c) guilty until he testifies.

Q 13—When a public officer refuses or neglects to perform his required duty a court may direct him to do so (a) by a presentment; (b) writ of certiorari; (c) writ of mandamus.

Q 14—The proceedings by which an alien is sent back to the country from which he came is called (a) deportation; (b) remission; (c) alienation.

Q 15—A court order directing a law officer to bring a person into court, dead or alive, is called (a) writ of recovery; (b) writ of habeas corpus; (c) quo warranto.

Q 16—An accused person may have a lawyer (a) only when accused of a serious crime; (b) when accused of any crime or offense; (c) when a judge gives him permission to have a lawyer.

Q 17—The felonious taking by fraud and carrying away of the property of another, without his consent is (a) larceny; (b) conversion; (c) misappropriation; (d) malfeasance.

Q 18—(Fill in the missing words) No person can be convicted of murder unless the (a) ..... and the (b) ..... as alleged are each established as independent facts, the former beyond a reasonable doubt and the latter by direct proof.

Q 19—An assault with intent to inflict bodily harm is classed as a crime (a) against the person; (b) misdemeanor; (c) felony.

Q 20—In a criminal case where a jury has acquitted the defendant, the state may (a) appeal from the verdict to a higher court; (b) may not appeal; (c) may appeal if the judge consents.

KEY ANSWERS: Q 1—(d); Q 2—(b); Q 3—(c); Q 4—(b); Q 5—(d); Q 6—(a); Q 7—(d); Q 8—(a); Q 9—(b); Q 10—(b); Q 11—(b); Q 12—(b); Q 13—(c); Q 14—(a); Q 15—(b); Q 16—(b); Q 17—(a); Q 18 (a) fact of the killing by the defendant; (b) death of the person alleged to have been killed. Q 19—(a); Q 20—(b).

RADIO TESTS

The increasing use of radio by police and other city departments has brought opportunities of employment to thousands of men in the last ten years. The large number of letters from readers of this department indicates a wide interest in radio positions. Below are reproduced sample questions in recent tests for the position of radio operator and radio engineer. In each test three hours was the time limit for completing the examination, and candidates were required to attain a passing minimum of 75 per cent.

RADIO OPERATOR. Candidates must answer ten of the following questions:

Q 1—A 10 ohm resistance is placed in the series with 3-30 ohm resistance in multiple. The whole circuit is put across 110 volts D.C. How much current and power does the circuit take?

Q 2—What are the constructional and operating differences between acid and alkaline storage batteries?

Q 3—What is the difference between a D.C. and an A.C. voltmeter?

Q 4—Give the circuit of a wheatstone bridge and tell how the device is used.

Q 5—Give the wiring diagram of a D.C. motor and starting box. Show also a speed control in the circuit.

Q 6—What difficulties are introduced in a broadcasting station when a commutator sparks badly? How is this sparking generally remedied?

Q 7—What is an induction motor? How may it be reversed?

Q 8—What is a starting compensator and where is it used?

Q 9—How may the power in a circuit be measured by means of a watt meter? Give the circuit.

Q 10—How is a thermo-couple ammeter constructed?

Q 11—What is a transformer? How is it constructed? How may a transformer give trouble in a broadcasting station.

RADIO ENGINEER—(Answer 7).

Q 1—A quantity of electricity amounting to 20 coulombs is dissipated in a resistance circuit at a steady rate, the current remaining constant over a period of 5 seconds. The resistance of the circuit being 10 ohms, what will be the power dissipated?

Q 2—Summarize briefly the theory, construction and practical use of the follow-

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ing electrical measuring instruments:

(a) alternating watt-hour meter.
(b) direct current watt-hour meter.
(c) dynamometer moving coil.
(d) D Arsonval-type voltmeters.
(e) Thermo-couple radio frequency ammeter.
(f) hot-wire ammeter.
(g) string oscillograph.
(h) electrostatic voltmeter.

Q 3—Illustrate by diagram the Y-and delta-connection used in 3-wire, 3-phase A.C. circuits.

Q 4—Define fully the following terms in vacuum tube nomenclature:

Cathode—Grid—Anode — Amplification factor—Mutual conductance—Input impedance (usually called simply output impedance).

Q 5—Summarize, non-mathematically, the general theory of operation of the three-electrode vacuum tube in each of the following functions:

Audio frequency amplifier — Modulator in a constant current modulation system—Radio frequency oscillator.

Q 6—What are the advantages of the TU in telephone calculations?

Q 7—Discuss the utility on buildings, and on the ground, of the supporting systems listed below for transmitting antennas.

(a) Self-supporting steel towers.
(b) Guyed steel masts.
(c) Guyed wooden masts.

Key answers to the above tests will not be given since they involve extended technical answers. The questions will, however, forewarn prospective candidates as to what they may expect in an actual test.

GENERAL LABORATORY ASSISTANT

For readers who have requested sample test questions for general laboratory assistant the following are reproduced from an examination held in July, 1935:

Q 1—Describe, in detail, a method by which hydrogen may be generated in the laboratory. Make a sketch of the necessary apparatus.

Q 2—State exactly how you would undertake the preparation of a (a) normal solution; (b) molar solution. Give example of each.

Q 3—Complete the following:

(a) $Zn\ Cl + 2KCN =$
(b) $2KI + 4^2o =$
(c) $M_8Cl^2 + N^2a\ 2HPO_4 + NH =$

Q 4—Define (a) base acid; (b) catalytic agent; (c) molecule; (d) ion; (e) salt.

THE Q AND A BOX

Questions pertaining to civil service will be answered without cost by "G-2." If an individual reply is desired send stamped, addressed envelope.

Philip Geer, Chicago, and others.—Age limits for junior forester, U. S. Forest Service, do not apply to candidates with military preference. Starting salary is $2,000 a year; the duties, to assist in scaling and marking timber for sale, constructing roads, trails and other engineering work, cruising and mapping timber land, assisting in nursery and planting work, fire, insect and disease protection, wild-life management, research in silviculture, forest products, range management and forest economics. Test subjects have these relative weights; forest economics and management, 60; forest utilization, 40. An examination for junior forester and junior range examiner was held in the summer of 1936.

Herman Asch, New York City.—Assistant architect, Division of Labor Standards, U. S. Department of Labor, pays $2,600 a year to start. No written test is given but candidates must have certain educational qualifications and actual experience; they must submit samples of their work, the design of an industrial problem, design of an exhibit for traveling purposes. Candidates must not have reached their fortieth year except veterans with granted preference.

Henry Topham, Minneapolis.—The congressman who is in charge of the bill to compel the U. S. Civil Service Commission to make public information of interest to eligibles on federal lists is Martin J. Kennedy, address, House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

Coming Next Week—Fingerprinting Tests

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COMING NEXT WEEK!

The Devil Laughed

By Robert H. Leitfred

G-man Ed Kirby takes his life in his hands to play a Judas rôle in a murder ring.

Death in the Air

By Cornell Woolrich

Inspector Lively walked slowly and talked slowly—but he thought fast, and that's what pays dividends on a dope fiend's murder-trail!

Kato Cries Kill

By Earl W. Scott

Ellen Conway sought refuge in that lonely mansion from the black of night, the baying of a dog, and the vengeance of a killer!

Plus stories by

FRED MACISAAC

THEODORE TINSLEY

And many others

And the regular

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

features by

M. E. OHAVER L. U. REAVIS

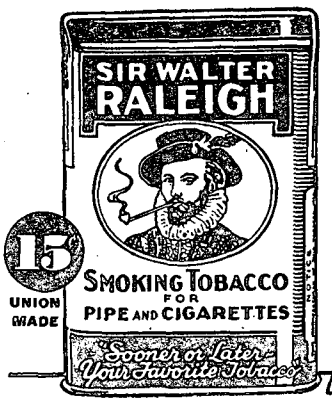
FRANK WRENTMORE "G-2"

Detective Fiction Weekly

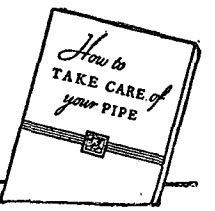
LO—THE POOR INDIAN!

TWO PUFFS from that soggy pipe full of firewater tobacco and another redskin bit the dust. We tell travelers as well as stay-at-homes that the true pipe of peace should be regularly cleaned, and packed with nothing but inoffensive Sir Walter Raleigh Smoking Tobacco. It's a secret blend of definitely milder Kentucky Burley leaf. Burns slow, pacifies the tenderest tongue and spreads a most delightful and winning fragrance. We're so blamed proud of Sir Walter Raleigh we wrap it in heavy gold foil for extra freshness. Ever treated yourself to a tin? Only 15¢.

SWITCH TO THE BRAND OF GRAND AROMA



FREE booklet tells how to make your old pipe taste better, sweeter; how to break in a new pipe. Write for copy today. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Louisville, Kentucky. Dept. MS-610.



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Train NOW for hotel, club and institutional field. Salaries up to $1,500 to $5,000 a year, living often included. Previous experience proved unnecessary. Qualify at home, in leisure time. National Placement Service FREE of extra charge. Write name and address in margin and mail this ad today for FREE Book. Check positions in which you're interested.
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{ } Assistant Manager { } Hostess
{ } Chief or Room Clerk { } Housekeeper
And/or { } Cashier
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Room MS-5213 Washington, D. C.

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A miraculous invention brings you new home lighting far better than electricity or old wick lamp at fraction of the cost. Fill your home with soft, brilliant, non-flickering white light for hours at few cents cost! Enjoy this amazing new light without the fuss of wicks to trim, chimneys to clean and break, or tangling cords or wires! Carry it anywhere. HOME TRIAL for 30 days at our risk before deciding. Your choice of beautiful art lamp models at direct-factory prices! WRITE TODAY!
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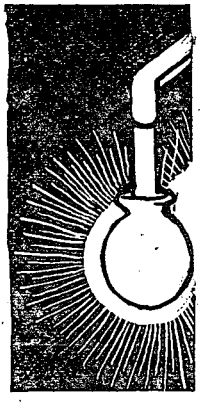

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on GOODYEAR
FIRESTONE-GOODRICH
U. S. and other makes
$1.85
28-4.75-19
We will not be undersold. These low prices are unbeatable for Standard Tires repaired by our Improved Method and skilled workmen. Our 20 years' experience assures complete satisfaction. Buy now before prices advance. For a limited time get a Genuine RAY-O-VAC Lantern absolutely free with each order for 2 tires. Don't delay—order today!

BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$1.85	$0.85
29x4.50-20	1.85	.85
30x4.50-21	1.95	.85
28x4.75-19	1.85	.95
29x4.75-20	2.10	.95
29x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
5.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-17	2.85	1.15
30x6.00-18	2.85	1.15
31x6.00-19	2.85	1.15
32x6.00-20	2.95	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.10	1.25
32x6.50-20	3.20	1.35
6.00-16	3.15	1.45

TRUCK BALLOONS

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.10	$1.65
6.50-20	3.35	1.95
7.00-20	4.60	2.95
7.50-20	5.15	3.75

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$3.50	$1.95
32x6	6.95	2.75
34x7	8.95	3.25
38x7	9.45	3.95
36x8	9.65	3.95
40x8	11.60	4.15

ALL OTHER SIZES
DEALERS WANTED

FREE! With Every 2 Tires ordered RAY-O-VAC LANTERN
Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($2.00 on each Truck Tire.) Pay balance C. O. D. Deduct 5% if cash is sent in full with order. We may substitute brands if necessary, to ship promptly. ALL TUBES NEW—GUARANTEED. We agree to replace at half price any tire failing to give 9 months' service.
GLOBE TIRE & RUBBER CO. Dept. 2501-A
3857-59 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Gunpowder Detector

IN the storehouse of scientific knowledge are many things available for the use of the crime investigator. From one of the shelves in this storeroom we take down a package labeled, "Gunpowder Detector," and examine it. This turns out to be a method of determining whether or not a suspect has fired a gun recently. According to the directions, a mixture is made of wax, sulphuric acid and diphenylamine and is applied to the trigger finger of the suspect.

If the suspect has fired a gun recently a blue ring will form on the trigger finger to which the mixture has been applied. This is because a minute quantity of nitrate had embedded itself in the trigger finger when the gun was fired and the chemicals of the mixture react with it to produce the before mentioned blue ring.

—*John Berry.*

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Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H-72, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

LIQUOR HABIT
Send for FREE TRIAL of Noxalco, a guaranteed harmless home treatment. Can be given secretly in food or drink to anyone who drinks or craves Whiskey, Beer, Gin, Home Brew, Wine, Moonshine, etc. Your request for Free Trial brings trial supply by return mail and full $2.00 treatment which you may try under a 30 day refund guarantee. Try Noxalco at our risk. ARLEE CO. Dept. 204 BALTIMORE, MD.

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Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn
$3,000 to $10,000 Annually
We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1068-L, Chicago

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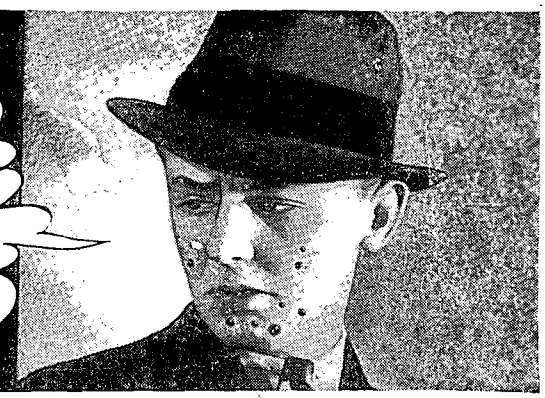
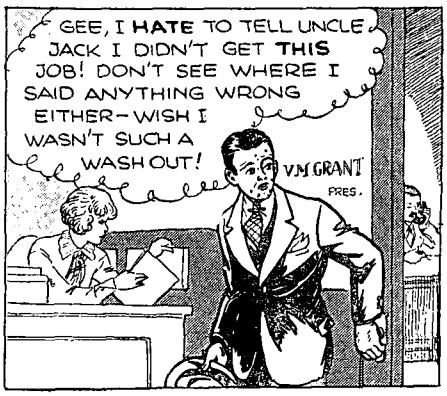
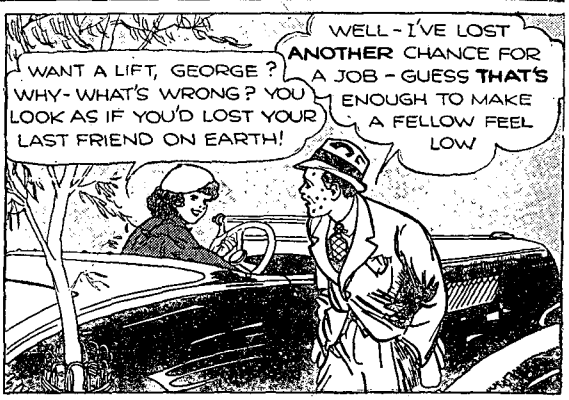
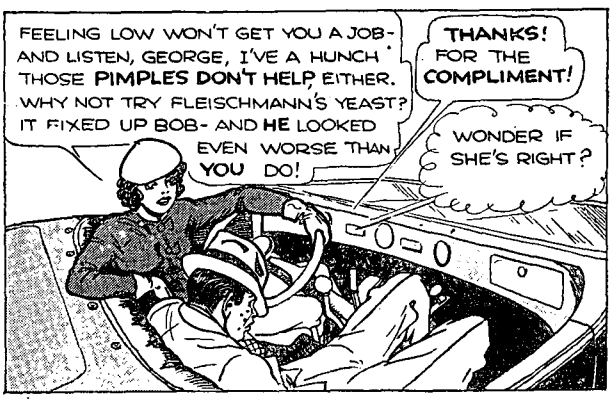
WISH I KNEW *WHY* THEY ALL TURN ME DOWN

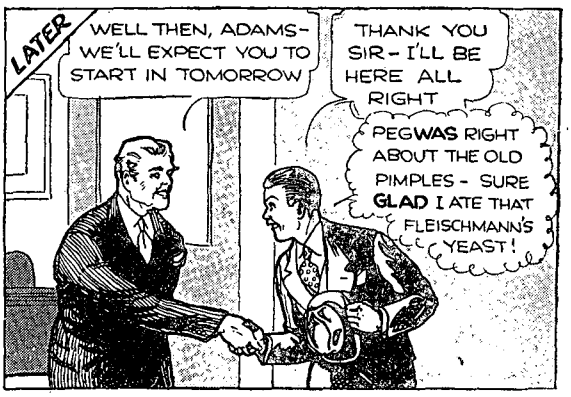


A PIMPLY SKIN CAN SPOIL ANY BOY'S CHANCES FOR A JOB


GEE, I HATE TO TELL UNCLE JACK I DIDN'T GET THIS JOB! DON'T SEE WHERE I SAID ANYTHING WRONG EITHER—WISH I WASN'T SUCH A WASH OUT!
V.M GRANT PRES.


WANT A LIFT, GEORGE? WHY—WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK AS IF YOU'D LOST YOUR LAST FRIEND ON EARTH!
WELL—I'VE LOST ANOTHER CHANCE FOR A JOB—GUESS THAT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE A FELLOW FEEL LOW


FEELING LOW WON'T GET YOU A JOB—AND LISTEN, GEORGE, I'VE A HUNCH THOSE PIMPLES DON'T HELP, EITHER. WHY NOT TRY FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST? IT FIXED UP BOB—AND HE LOOKED EVEN WORSE THAN YOU DO!
THANKS! FOR THE COMPLIMENT!
WONDER IF SHE'S RIGHT?


LATER
WELL THEN, ADAMS—WE'LL EXPECT YOU TO START IN TOMORROW
THANK YOU SIR—I'LL BE HERE ALL RIGHT
PEG WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE OLD PIMPLES—SURE GLAD I ATE THAT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST!

SAY, PEG—HERE'S REAL NEWS! I GOT THE JOB. SURE THING! WHAT? OH, QUIT THE KIDDING—NO, I'M NOT VICE-PRESIDENT YET, BUT I'VE GOT SWELL PROSPECTS!
PUBLIC PHONE

—clears the skin

by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

Don't let Adolescent Pimples keep YOU from getting a start

FIRST IMPRESSIONS are important, and —a pimply skin is a real drawback to *any* boy or girl seeking a job.

But pimples are very apt to occur after the start of adolescence—from about 13 to 25. At this time, important glands develop and final growth takes place. The entire system is disturbed. The skin gets oversensitive. Waste poisons in the blood irritate this sensitive skin and cause unsightly pimples to break out.

Fleischmann's Yeast clears these skin irritants out of the blood. Then, the pimples go! Eat 3 cakes a day, one before meals—plain, or in a little water—until skin clears. Start today!

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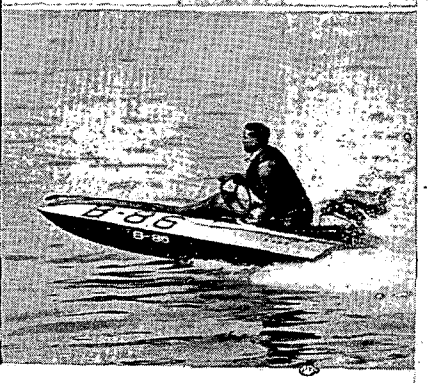
"NEWS COMES FIRST," says Miss Helen Nolan, reporter, "eating, second. So I turn to Camels. Food tastes better and digests easier when I smoke Camels."



HUMAN COMETS. Hugo and Mario Zacchini disappear deep into the maw of a monster cannon. *A flash!—a crash!*—and these human bullets hurtle across the arena. As a test of digestion, this stands by itself. "We smoke Camels," says Hugo. "Camels keep digestion working smoothly."

FIRST in the Albany-New York Outboard Marathon! Clayton Bishop says: "Camels are a swell aid to digestion—make my food taste better and digest easier."

PEOPLE CAN MEET TERRIFIC STRAIN—YET ENJOY GOOD DIGESTION.

SMOKERS SPEAK FROM EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY SAY—

"For Digestion's Sake — Smoke Camels!"

Costlier Tobaccos!

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.

© 1936 R. J. Reynolds Tob. Co.

MODERN life bombards us all with a thousand and one shocks and nervous irritations. The strain tells on digestion ...slows down the flow of digestive fluids.

And it is to the comforting cheer and refreshment of Camels that one naturally turns to put more enjoyment into eating. As you enjoy your Camels at mealtime, the flow of digestive fluids speeds up... alkalinity is increased. You feel at rights with the world!

Camels set you right! And they don't get on your nerves or tire your taste.

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